

THE VALUE OF WATER, P10 | OPEN THE DEBATES! P14 | ROJAVA'S WARRIOR WOMEN, P18

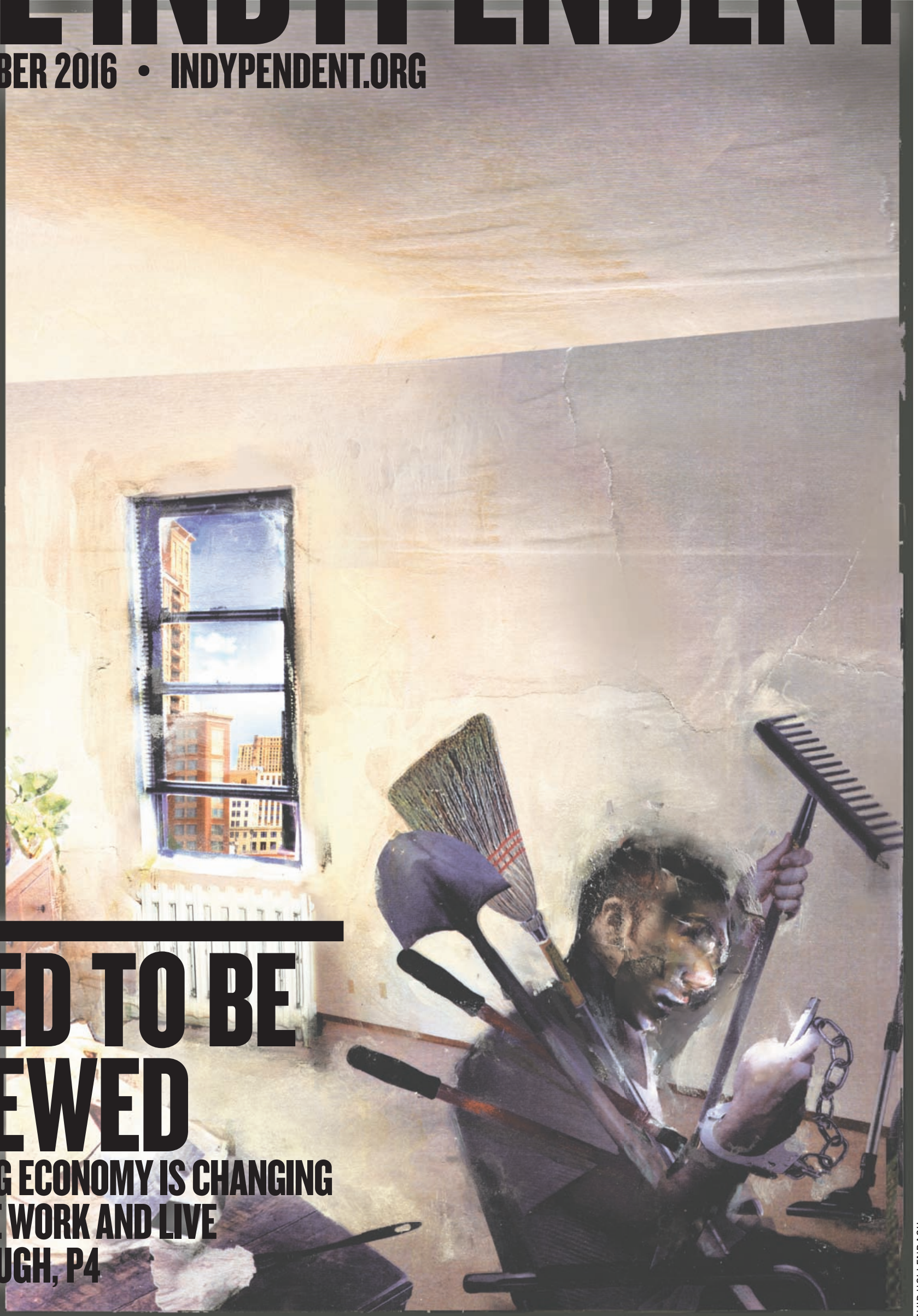
# THE INDYPENDENT

#217: OCTOBER 2016 • INDYPENDENT.ORG

## APPED TO BE SCREWED

HOW THE GIG ECONOMY IS CHANGING  
THE WAY WE WORK AND LIVE

BY PETER RUGH, P4






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# READER'S VOICE

## PUBLIC ENEMIES

The issue is that most of our police forces are corrupt (“Black Lives Matter Hunkers Down Outside City Hall 24/7,” August *Indypendent*). They have become the number one enemy of the people in this country. They work to benefit the corporations that are in control of our judicial system, our jails and detention centers. We are the country with the most people in jail. Most are poor Blacks and Hispanics that do not have the money to get justice. The courts and the judicial system work only for the ones that have the money to pay.

— JUAN REYNOSO

## THERE ARE WORSE OPTIONS

The Democrats screwed up (“Stop the Shaming: My Unsolicited Advice to Clinton Backers,” Indy Blog). They nominated a warmongering neoliberal who is bound to make things worse for working people and the poor. But at least she's not an ignorant narcissistic sociopath like Trump.

— CHARLES D.

## WHICH SIDE IS SHE ON?

What scares me most is that supposed "mainstream Republicans" are backing Secretary Clinton (“Clinton Refuses to Labor for Working Class Votes,” August *Indypendent*). Not Tea Party wackos. Prominent past and present right-wingers. It makes me think Ms. Clinton is nothing more than a Republican turned inside out.

— SCOTT BALLARD

## EASE UP ON CLINTON, DEMS

There's too much sniping at Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party in the August issue of *The Indypendent*. The die is cast at this point. Bernie Sanders has lost and Clinton is the nominee. If anyone wants to support the Green Party, they should make their case. If that is not the path they are plotting, the sniping and sneering doesn't accomplish anything, except to estrange younger people from participation in the election.

Of course, all of this provides ammunition for Donald Trump, who is getting a free ride while all this anti-Clinton stuff is going on. Most consequentially, it totally misreads the frame of mind of Blacks, Latinos, gays, and other groups that are most committed to the Democratic Party.

Hillary's campaign is a wonderful way to build coalitions and bring various minorities closer together with one another and with the left. If the left is not involved in the Clinton victory, it will find itself totally cut off from the people it purports to be so concerned about.

— GERALD MEYER

## STRAIGHT, WHITE, MALE AND CONFUSED

Thank you so much for writing this (“In Praise of Allies,” August *Indypendent*). It meant a lot to me.

Several months ago, a person I considered an

ally, as well as a comrade, a confidante and, most of all, a very good and valued friend turned on me. It has been very painful. I really don't know the underlying story of what was going on. Indeed, not knowing has made it all the more difficult. The last face-to-face conversation we ever had involved her tearing into me for being a straight, white male. I thought we were tight but here was this person heaping contempt on me, because, among many other things, “I don't know how good I have it.”

I am well aware that there is a lot of stuff that I don't have to go through because I am a straight, white male. I am also aware that I'm often not aware of it, if that doesn't sound too silly. The injustice of this society that I live in, that I was born into, pains me considerably. I have tried, inadequately no doubt, but I have tried, to do what I can to change that. I didn't have any choice in the matter of being born a straight, white male.

— ERIC V.

## STRENGTH IN UNITY

Really beautiful article (“In Praise of Allies,” August *Indypendent*). Power to the people. More and more see that to win our fights we must stand with one another.

— ATHENA SOULES

## SOMETHING WRONG IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Those trains go by my house, one hundred yards away (“Bomb Trains on the Hudson,” August *Indypendent*). They're too close for comfort.

— RAJ T.

**LET US KNOW WHAT YOU ARE THINKING. EMAIL COMMENTS@INDYPENDENT.ORG.**

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**THE INDYPENDENT**  
#216: AUGUST 2016 • WWW.INDYPENDENT.ORG





**SUN SEP 18–TUE OCT 8**

\$12–\$20 per show, passes \$25  
**NEW YORK GYPSY FESTIVAL**  
 The NY Gypsy Festival celebrates its 12th year with another outstanding performance schedule and a total of six shows. Highlights include the Turkish clarinet master, Husnu Senlendirici, the eclectic Hungarian folk-fiddle ensemble Sondergo and Bulgarian bagpipe phenom Kaynak Pipers Band.  
 Drom  
 85 Ave A  
 nygypsyfest.com

**FRI–SAT SEP 23–24, 30**

\$10 suggested donation per screening  
**BLACK PANTHER FILM FESTIVAL**  
 This year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party. This festival will honor the legacy of the party and its members, a number of whom remain political prisoners today. Films include *Free Angela and Tupac Vs. Maysles Cinema*  
 343 Malcolm X Blvd  
 maysles.org  
 (212) 537-6843

## SEP 24 COMMUNITY REPORTING WORKSHOP

*Want to learn the basics of journalism but aren't sure where to start? The Independent will host a community reporting workshop Saturday Sept. 24 from 1–5pm at the Brooklyn Commons. Spaces are limited. To RSVP, please email [contact@independent.org](mailto:contact@independent.org).*

**SAT–SUN SEP 24–25**

1–6PM • FREE  
**WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK FOLK FESTIVAL**  
 This fest features the best of local New York and national talent in folk music — string bands, Blues, jug bands, traditional Mexican and Balkan music, New Orleans Jazz, Klezmer — at Washington Square Park, an historic site for American folk going back to the 1940's.  
 Washington Square Park  
 wsfolkfest.com

**TUE SEP 27**

8:30–10:30PM • \$10 • 18+

**THE TRUE HISTORY OF THE NYPD**

Explore the history of law enforcement in NYC from its origins in the Dutch night watch system, past the pugilistic and corrupt cops of the Tammany Hall era, through the sporadic attempts at reform, and into the current era of policing.  
 The Brooklyn Brainery  
 190 Underhill Ave  
 brooklynbrainery.com

**WED SEP 28**

6:30–9:30 PM • \$6–\$15  
**TALK: BEARING WITNESS IN THE AGE OF ONGOING POLICE BRUTALITY**

This event explores how ordinary New Yorkers are using community patrols, documentaries and community mapping to make our hoods safer. Speakers include Kathleen Foster, Nabil Hassein, Josmar Trujillo, Kazembe Balagun and Ramsey Orta. Proceeds benefit Orta, who videoed the police murder of Eric Garner, and is scheduled to go to jail Oct 3.  
 Verso Books  
 20 Jay Street, Suite 1010  
 marxproject.org

**THU SEP 29–SAT OCT 1**

\$10  
**RAUCOUS CAUCUS: 10-MINUTE POLITICAL PLAY FESTIVAL**  
 Mainstream media doesn't often allow for opposing views to engage in constructive dialogue. So, Box Wine Theatre has selected seven plays from around the country covering gun control, Donald Trump, government gridlock and GOP-phobia. For showtimes and reservations visit [thepit-nyc.com](http://thepit-nyc.com) or call 212-563-7488.  
 The Peoples Improv

Theatre (The PIT)  
 123 E 24th St  
 Thepit-nyc.com  
 212-563-7488

**FRI SEP 30**

7–9:30PM • FREE  
**BOOK LAUNCH: WHEN THE CHANT COMES**  
 Kay Ulanday Barrett has been bringing his unique poetry to audiences for over a decade; unpicking vital political questions around race, disability and gender, and chronicling the everydayness of life in the U.S. Empire with acute perceptiveness and vitality. Now at last a generous selection of his work is available in print. Come and celebrate it!  
 Bluestockings Bookstore  
 172 Allen St  
 Bluestockings.com

**SAT OCT 1**

10AM–6PM • \$15–20  
**CHILI PEPPER FESTIVAL**  
 New York's hottest fall tradition features blazing bands from around the world, including African, Cajun, Latin, and Moroccan beats! Feel the burn as you sample hi-scoville sauces from Brooklyn and beyond.  
 Brooklyn Botanical

Gardens  
 Entrance at 455 Flatbush Ave  
 bbg.org

**SAT OCT 1**

6–9PM • 21+  
**LIT CRAWL NYC • FREE**  
 A bar crawl with literature, Lit Crawl NYC is an annual literary event where cerebral meets madcap. Lively, wildly popular, and free to the public, Lit Crawl features a grab bag of activities along a rambling route from the Lower East Side to the East Village, including brainy readings with

New York's top authors and wacky games like Literary Pictionary and Nerd Jeopardy. Sure to please readers, writers, and all fun-loving boozers.  
 Bluestockings Bookstore  
 172 Allen St.  
 bluestockings.com

**TUE OCT 4/WED OCT 5**

6–7:30PM  
**LEARN HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN TV SHOW**  
 Manhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN) is a public access television network offering hyperlocal programming and low-cost video production courses to Manhattan residents at its El Barrio Firehouse Community Media Center in East Harlem. Register for a free orientation to learn how you can take media education courses and become the certified producer of your own tv show. Wednesday night's orientation is for Spanish speakers. Register in advance at [mnn.org/orientation](http://mnn.org/orientation).  
 El Barrio Firehouse Community Media Center  
 175 E. 104th St.  
 mnn.org/orientation  
 212-757-2670

**WED OCT 12**

6–7:15PM • \$11 • 18+  
**CANDY: FROM EARLY HISTORY TO HALLOWEEN**  
 Isn't it weird that one day a year it's appropriate to threaten people into giving you candy? Where did the Halloween tradition come from? And actually, how did we come up with candy in the first place? In this class, gastronomic historian Sarah Lohman covers a world history of candy, from the botanic roots of sugarcane, to the first processed confections from the Middle East, to the magical candy medicines of medieval Europe. Then, she'll sort out the origins of Halloween, along with modern myths like the "razor blade in the apple."  
 The Brooklyn Brainery  
 190 Underhill Ave  
 brooklynbrainery.com

**WED OCT 12**

7:30–9:30PM • \$6–\$15  
**LECTURE: TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM**  
 Writer and researcher Basuli Deb discusses her book, *Transnational Feminist Perspectives on Terror in Literature and Culture*, which offers a transnational feminist response to the gender politics of torture and terror. Deb's research draws widely on postcolonial literature, photography, films, music, interdisciplinary arts, media/new media, and activism.  
 The Commons  
 388 Atlantic Avenue  
 thecommonsbrooklyn.org

**SAT OCT 15**

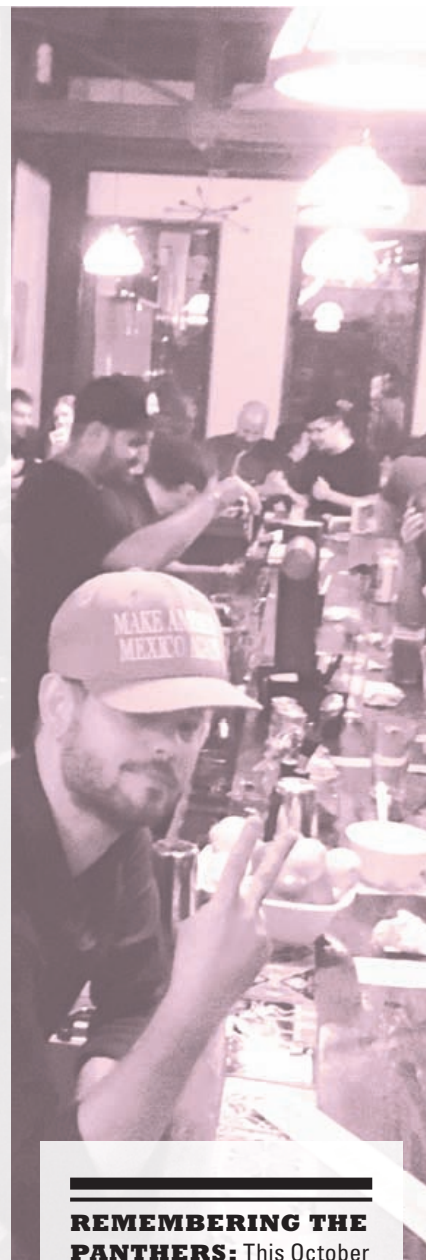
12–2PM

**& THU OCT 20**

1–3PM  
**LEARN HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN TV SHOW**  
 Register for a free orientation at Manhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN) to learn how you can take media education courses and become the certified producer of your own tv show on our network. Register in advance at [mnn.org/orientation](http://mnn.org/orientation). Contact 212-757-2670 or [education@mnn.org](mailto:education@mnn.org) for more information.  
 59th Street Studios  
 537 W. 59th St  
 Mnn.org/orientation  
 212-757-2679

**KEEP YOUR CALENDAR OPEN**

4PM–2AM MON–WED • 4PM–4AM THU–SAT  
**NEW MOVEMENT HANGOUT: STARR BAR**  
 Starr Bar recently opened in Bushwick. Allied with the May Day space, the bar's mission is to be a neighborhood resource and a citywide stop for engaging programming, a home for radical thought and debate and a gathering place for people to work, learn, drink, dance and build together.  
 214 Starr St

**REMEMBERING THE PANTHERS:**

This October marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party. Maysles Cinema in Harlem will host its annual Black Panther Film Festival on Sept. 23, 24 and 30.

**GOOD TIMES:**

The activist friendly Starr Bar opened its doors on Sept. 9 and is now in business seven nights a week (See below). Located at 214 Starr St. in Bushwick, it is allied with the May Day community space.

ANA NOGUEIRA



# THE GIG IS UP

SILICON VALLEY IS TURNING BACK THE CLOCK ON WORKER GAINS AND NEW YORKERS ARE FEELING THE PINCH

BY PETER RUGH

The profile photos at taskrabbit.com will feel familiar to anyone who has ever used Facebook. But the people in them aren't looking for friendship, but rent money. Prices per hour are listed beside each person's beaming face, followed by the percentage of positive customer reviews they have received. Most of the cheery people are pitching their services — whether it's doing laundry or, as Taskrabbit advertised ahead of Fashion Week this month, being your Instagram husband — in the \$20 to \$30 range. But the company, which describes itself as “revolutionizing everyday work,” takes a 30 percent cut.

Not all revolutions are for the better.

If Silicon Valley has its way, this is what the proletariat — or, as some put it, the precariat — of tomorrow will look like: No uniforms. No hard hats decked out in union decals. No set workplace, really. Just a roving mass of underemployed laborers, recruited to advertise their smile online. Digital binders full of workers.

It goes by a few different names — sharing economy, on-demand economy — each of which tend to emphasize a different relationship in a triad among

consumer, software platform and worker. For simplicity's sake we'll call it the gig economy, but it's really just plain 19th-century-style exploitation dressed up in techie garb, harkening back to ye auld days before the labor movement won things like the eight-hour work day, the right to unionize, pensions, health care benefits, workers' compensation, unemployment benefits and job security.

“Nearly 35 percent of today's total workforce is composed of non-employee workers,” found a February survey from researchers with Ardent Partners and Fieldglass, which designs vendor-management systems (a fancy way of saying software used to hire temp workers). That figure includes freelancers, independent contractors and temporary workers.

The financial software company Intuit predicts that the number of contingent workers in the United States “will exceed 40 percent of the workforce by 2020,” and that it will also increase worldwide.

Silicon Valley is taking advantage of the 2008 recession that pushed workers off payrolls and into a precarious job market where there is less work to go around and wages aren't close to what they used to be.

“Part-time and contract jobs in the past tended to rise during recessions and recede during recoveries,” the *Associated Press* noted in 2014. “But



## JEAN TASKRABBIT

I was working with Google Shop Express. It's basically a same-day delivery service, Google's answer to Amazon. A friend recommended Taskrabbit to me and it seemed like a good way to get some side cash, so I applied. I was on a two-year contract with Google and when that was over I started doing Taskrabbit full time.

Moving jobs are the best, cause they pay \$30 to \$60 an hour, but most of the tasks don't pay that much. One time a guy paid me to attend a comedy show. Depending on how everything goes, I take in about \$300 a week using the app.

The benefit of Taskrabbit is that you can promote yourself and it's a great way to interact with different people. If you end up working for someone and you do really well, they could actually hire you full time.

The thing is though with Taskrabbit you don't have anything set in stone. You're constantly looking for jobs, looking for work and, sometimes, nobody's hiring you. It's like, “Why doesn't anybody want to hire me?” But, generally speaking, it keeps me pretty busy. I like it that way. I like working. If I would have to work less, I would have to find something else to cover up that free time.

Still, I wouldn't mind a vacation, now and then. I want to go to school for software engineering and create my own apps. It's just difficult coming up with tuition and everything.



PETER RUGH

## M. THUMB TACK

Before I started using Thumbtack I was making \$50,000 a year at a day job doing social media marketing and at night I was doing comedy shows, sketch comedy, improv, stand-up — that sort of thing. In May, I got fired. A friend told me about Thumbtack and I started using it. You fill out your profile and list all the things you're qualified for and Thumbtack sends you gigs. Applying for a gig costs you credits. It costs \$35 for 30 credits and it typically costs 7 credits to apply. Some of the gigs are kind of weird, like “Can you ghost-write this Christian novel?” Or, “Can you write my essay for college.”

Once I got hired by this woman who said she needed help with administrative assistance and social media for her independent publishing company. I was super excited to do that, but when I got to her place of business it turned out it was at her house and she had me doing things like ordering soap from Amazon and booking her flights. She wrote me a positive review but forgot to pay me. Eventually, I got a check in the mail after I reminded her, but it's a huge risk and it happens to my friends all the time.

I'm barely scraping by. I've been able to make it with acting gigs here and there and unemployment.

With a salaried job you're like, “Okay, well, this amount of money is going to come in every two weeks, so I can be broke for two days and then a paycheck's coming and it's going to be big. I can get an Uber, I can go out to eat.” Now there's a lot of uncertainty. It's been hard for me to adjust.

## NIYYA TASKRABBIT

I work for the Department of Youth and Community Development part-time and I'm also in school at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC). I work at the library there too, in their IT department, which is within my major. I answer the phones, change passwords, all that fun stuff. And since BMCC is in Lower Manhattan, I'll go and do a task for Taskrabbit on my lunch break and then I'll go back to work.

I normally get personal assistance and party decorating jobs through Taskrabbit. The issue I have with Taskrabbit is that when you hire me for the first time — I don't know if the users actually see this end of it — but 30 percent goes to Taskrabbit. It makes sense, I guess, they gotta pay their bills. If users hire you consecutively they take less of a cut. I think it's like 15 percent. But most of my jobs are one-offs.

Taskrabbit, they watch your chats with customers. You're not allowed to contact the client, or vice versa, without being on the Taskrabbit platform. They say that's because if something bad happens and it's not documented in their chat room, they don't really know what happened.

Another downside is that it's oversaturated. You have all these great people that have all these skills using the app, but at the end of the day there isn't enough work to go around.

My mom has worked two jobs for like 20 years each. But I feel like, for our generation, there are very little jobs to go around. There are no longterm possibilities. There are a lot of startup companies out there hiring that are here today and gone tomorrow. A lot of jobs are temporary. You have to find something else to supplement your income because the wages aren't stable.

One day I want to be on the beach in my beach house doing work from the beach. That's my goal. That's my aspiration in life. How I get there depends on what path I choose, but that's my goal.



PETER RUGH



NITAY MARG

maybe no longer: Part-time workers have accounted for more than 10 percent of U.S. job growth in the years since the recession officially ended in June 2009. Meanwhile, union membership has been sliding steadily since the mid-1980s.”

In order to get by, today’s labor force has to take what it can get. More and more, they’re turning to the gig economy.

A survey conducted last year by Intuit found that 3.2 million people are currently working in the gig economy. It estimated that number will reach 7.6 million within the next four years.

“The typical workweek includes a mixture of: on-demand work (34 percent), a traditional full or part-time job (30 percent), contracting and consulting (19 percent), and running a business (14 percent),” the

researchers noted.

“The on-demand economy is reshaping the way people earn a living, take control of their careers and support their families,” Intuit vice president Alex Chriss, general manager of Self-Employed Solutions, expounded in a press release. “[P]eople have more opportunities than ever to supplement existing income streams or to take the leap into being their own boss. But we must also recognize the shadows that have emerged. The benefits infrastructure of a generation ago was not built to accommodate the reality of work today.”

#### YOU ARE A COMMODITY

Silicon Valley has become adept at sucking value out

of nearly everything. Ebay was an early pioneer of this business model. Got a box of old GI Joes in your basement? Sell ’em on eBay. Airbnb applies this concept to your home. Got an extra room in your house? You can become a freelance hotelier. Uber does the same with cars. Become a taxi driver and pay off that loan on your Mazda. It is as if Silicon Valley can allow no commodity to exist without every possible penny being squeezed out of it.

Now it is applying this model to people.

“I’ll go and do a task for Taskrabbit on my lunch break, and then I’ll go back to work,” Niyya, a Brooklyn native in her twenties, told *The Independent*. In addition to holding two steady part-time jobs, she is also going to school, and fitting in gigs through the hiring platform. “My mom has worked two jobs for like 20 years each. But I feel like, for our generation, there are very few jobs to go around. There are no long-term possibilities. You have to find something else to supplement your income, because the wages aren’t stable.”

Whether it’s by performing previously professionalized jobs like providing taxi rides or hammering shelves to a wall, many workers in today’s economy cannot allow their free time to go by without turning it to dollars. Silicon Valley is there to help, provided it gets to wet its beak.

The hiring platform Thumbtack inverts Taskrabbit’s business model. Freelance workers, not the consumer, pay to use it, purchasing credits that they use to apply for mostly temporary, menial tasks — which they will not necessarily be hired to perform.

As cultural commentators such as Douglas Rushkoff have pointed out, despite claims of being part of a sharing economy, many of these companies have actually usurped platforms that provided their services for free. Before Taskrabbit and Thumbtack began connecting cash-strapped freelancers with gigs for a profit, there was Craigslist, which has never charged users a dime. Before there was Airbnb, there was couchsurfing.org, a social network that connected millions of travelers around the world with places to crash. Once a nonprofit, couchsurfing.org eventually tried to follow Airbnb’s path. It raised \$25 million in venture capital and changed its domain to couchsurfing.com.

Gig-economy platforms pitch their services as digitally innovative, providing flexibility to workers and greater convenience to customers. But as modern as the CEOs of billion-dollar

## D. UBER DRIVER

*I’m from Honduras but I’ve been living in the city for 30-something, almost 40 years. I’ve been a business owner. I had a repair garage. I had taxi medallions but I sold those. I owned a restaurant in Chelsea before all the galleries and clubs came in. I restore houses, too, on the side. In the old days, I drove a yellow cab when business wasn’t working out.*

*The cab driver is mistreated. People, they don’t think of you as a person. They just come and give orders — “Snap on it!” — ignoring that we are human beings. People are disrespectful, some people have sex in the car. They do a lot of stupid things in front of you. They want to smoke marijuana. They stink like marijuana. And what are you going to do? Throw them out? Every single one? There are so many.*

*Originally, the passengers were a nice crowd with Uber, but then as Uber grew it was just like in a yellow cab. Uber is like cancer, you see it here, see it there. You can’t control it.*

*Uber told us that it is going to make us very rich. Anybody who has four wheels and insurance, they say, “Okay, go and drive.” But we don’t get no job protection. We don’t get no retirement. We don’t get no bonus. What we get is a lot of work.*

*A trip from here to Williamsburg in a yellow cab costs \$10 to \$15; on Uber it’s \$7. I will start work at two in the afternoon and by midnight I will have \$300, not including payment for tolls, not including gasoline, not including payment for the car, not including Uber fees. But by then I’ve got to keep working because people are coming out of the bars. And I need the money.*

*All told I put in 16- to 18-hour days. I live in the car. If I want to work in the morning after driving all night, I can’t go home. So I stay in Brooklyn or Queens or wherever I am. I sleep in the car. That’s what we all do. It’s not busy, we’re waiting for passengers, we sleep in the car. Everything has to do with the car.*

*Sometimes I think, “What if we all stop driving for one day, just to see what Uber’s reaction would be.”*

## PHOEBE CRAIG’S LIST

*I worked at a private university for ten years, sometimes part-time, sometimes full. I left two years ago because I didn’t want to be tied to a desk, shuffling paperwork. It just felt like it was sucking out my soul. Since then, I’ve tried to piece together part-time and temporary work so that I have time to do other things. I’m not making a very good go of it. I haven’t found how to get by yet and I’m going into debt.*

*At my old job at the private university I had a 401k. That was part of working there. Then the economy crashed and that practically disappeared. That’s when I learned the difference between a pension and a 401K. With a pension, the risk is on the employer. With a 401K the risk is on the employee.*

*I use Craigslist to hunt for jobs. I considered doing Taskrabbit and I even signed up to go to their orientation a couple of times, but never went. I just felt uncomfortable being hired by some random stranger to come to their house to hang curtains or something and then be on my way. I’d rather find something longer term.*

*I’m working at an office through a hiring agency now. The job pays alright but I might have to quit because I’m on Medicaid and it cuts off if I make more than \$16,000 a year.*

*My boyfriend owns his apartment. He moved in ’92 and was able to buy it at auction. One day we’re going to take what’s left of my 401K, renovate his apartment, rent it out to some rich Wall Street-type and then move to Europe so we have health care and live on the rent. That is our retirement plan.*

*This political structure is totally fucked. We need to tear it down and build something new.*

PETER RUGH

Continued on next page



## GIG ECONOMY

*Continued from previous page*

lar startups want the gig economy to appear, it is actually turning back the clock on the gains workers fought for and won over the past 150 years.

### CONQUERING THE WORLD ON WORKERS' BACKS

"They want all the benefits of being a service provider without any of the responsibilities of being a service provider," said Tom Slee, a software engineer and author of *What's Yours Is Mine: The Dark Side of the "Sharing Economy."* "Uber is taking 30, 35 percent of the amount of any fare. Airbnb takes about 13 to 15 percent of any rental. They're involved in every transaction. They take a significant amount of money from every transaction. Yet when push comes to shove, they want to say, 'This is not our responsibility and we want nothing to do with it if anything goes wrong.' A well-presented platform can be quite useful to people who have skills to promote, but these current ones end up being [based on] a largely exploitative model."

Uber, valued at \$68 billion — more than any other privately held company in the world — sets the standard in the gig economy. It has argued that its drivers are not employees, but independent contractors using its network. This allows them to evade taxes, licensing laws in most areas, and a whole slew of labor regulations.

"If you call your workers contractors and they believe you, you're denying them access to rights as an employee," said Zubin Soleimany, an attorney with the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, which is pursuing several legal claims against Uber for violating basic workers' rights.

The alliance filed a class-action lawsuit against Uber on behalf of its 35,000 New York City drivers in June, accusing it of failing to pay minimum wage or overtime and not reimbursing drivers for expenses such as tolls or the high-end vehicles the company pushes its workers to purchase upon enlistment.

"Behind every customer seeking a fast ride is a worker, often working 60 to 80 hours a week, who is denied the basic rights of being an employee," the suit states.

One such person is D., an Uber driver about 60 years old who also works for several other platform-based cab services, and declined to be identified for fear of retribution from the company.

"We don't get no job protection," D. said, speaking in Lower Manhattan. "We don't get no retirement. We don't get no bonus. What we get is a lot of work. A trip from here to Williamsburg in a yellow cab costs \$10 to \$15. On Uber, it's \$7. I will start work at two in the afternoon, and by midnight I will have \$300, not including payment for tolls, not including gasoline, not including payment for the car, not including Uber fees. But by then, I've got to keep working because people are coming out of the bars. And I need the money. All told I put in 16- to 18-hour days. I live in the car."

The cash-flush company's low fares have helped it undercut competition, giving it a near-monopoly among app-based car services (89 percent of U.S. market share) and making it increasingly difficult for traditional cab companies to get by. Having essentially cornered the market across the U.S., Uber is expanding globally. It now operates on five continents. Its cheap rides allow it to conquer competition, and its empire is built on the backs of workers who are scrimping to get by.

What's more is that once drivers are kicked off of Uber's network — typically, for failing to meet the company's secretive and largely arbitrary star-rating standards — they are "left to hang out to dry," as the Soleimany put it.

The Taxi Workers Alliance also filed a complaint in July against New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and the state Department of Labor on behalf of two former Uber drivers who have waited months to receive unemployment benefits. Though the handbook for claimants says that it takes three weeks to six weeks to settle an unemployment claim, the department has refused to inform the drivers whether or not they are eligible. Instead, they were told by email that all unemployment claims by Uber drivers are under "executive review" and cannot be processed. The complaint charges the department with refusing to investigate Uber's misclassification of its employees as independent contractors.

Cuomo denies playing a role in the department's policies, but it is under his authority, and the governor has praised Uber as "one of these great inventions, start-ups, of this new economy." He backs legislation that would erase a ban on private "transportation network companies" outside New York City. Uber and Lyft have lobbied heavily for the bill, as it would let them expand their business model to upstate.

### THE PRICE OF CONVENIENCE

Though premised on exploitation and a Randian quest for world domination, the gig economy does offer consumers greater convenience — assuming they can afford surge rates for taxis whenever it rains, and are fine with

"[W]e must find a path forward that encourages innovation, embraces new models, creates certainty for workers, business, and government and ensures that workers and their families can lead sustainable lives and realize their dreams," reads a statement on "principles for delivering a stable and flexible safety net for all types of work" signed last November by several Silicon Valley CEOs, including those for Lyft, Handy and Etsy, along with leaders of the Service Employees International Union, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and the National Guestworker Alliance.

The letter lists some lofty-sounding principles, but it raises more questions than it answers:

Who should contribute financially (and how much)? What type of organization (or organizations) should administer these benefits and protections? What type of legislative or regulatory action is required to create or enable this model while allowing for experimentation and flexibility? We believe these issues are best pursued through policy development, not litigation, with an orientation toward action in the public, private and social sectors.

Rather than reinventing the wheel, however, perhaps gig workers stand to gain the most the way the labor movement always has — by organizing.

The Taxi Workers Alliance has made inroads in organizing Uber drivers in New York and staged a one-day strike in February, but so far, Silicon Valley has been successful in using America's weak labor movement to its advantage.

**SILICON VALLEY HAS BECOME ADEPT AT SUCKING VALUE OUT OF NEARLY EVERYTHING. AND NOW IT IS APPLYING THIS MODEL TO PEOPLE.**

a housing shortage that increases rent for vacant apartments in their neighborhood because landlords are operating illegal hotels for Airbnb tourists.

The gig economy is great for consumers, unless you are a person of color, rejected because of your profile picture — a problem Airbnb only announced it has begun to address this month. Or if you are disabled, as Elizabeth Ramos found out after repeatedly trying to hail a wheelchair-accessible Uber ride last summer.

"Uber is known for being a little more economical," Ramos, who has severe scoliosis, told the Daily News. "Not having them defeats the purpose for people like myself, for people in a wheelchair, to live a normal life."

Ramos is suing Uber, arguing that the app is a public accommodation like any other taxi service, and is thus subject to the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

Even assuming the gig economy makes consumption easier for those who can afford it, it is almost as if consumers are being asked to take Jello Biafra's 1980s quip, "Give me convenience or give me death," literally. What price does this new world of having goods and services at our fingertips come at, if it unravels our basic social fabric?

The real cost of the gig economy, if we are to believe those who see its share of the overall workforce growing perpetually over the coming decades, might not be fully apparent until Taskrabbit workers like the Niyya reach their seventies. What will happen to millions of workers who reach retirement age without funds to cover living and health-care expenses? Will they still be hopping here and there performing low-paid tasks until they need walkers?

### LESSONS OF THE PAST

The gig economy's prophets say they are concerned about the workers of the world, too.

When, in May, Uber announced it would grant its drivers the option of joining the new Independent Drivers Guild, the New York Post editorial board worried that unionized cabbies could lead to the company's downfall. But the Post has little to fear. As Taxi Workers Alliance executive director Bhairavi Desai observed, the guild, though organized through the Machinists Union, receives the bulk of its funding from Uber.

"It's essentially just an old-fashioned company union," she said.

There are some success stories.

Bikers with the London-based food delivery service Deliveroo managed to fend off wage cuts last month with a six-day strike. They used a crowdfunding site on the Internet to solicit contributions for their strike fund.

Workers' movements in the past have sought to own the means of production. Today, that includes owning the software. Visitors to [internetofownership.net](http://internetofownership.net) will find a global database of service platforms that offer ownership and work-related democracy to their participants, an emerging movement known as platform cooperatism.

Gig-economy workers are up against billions of dollars in capital and the political power that comes with it. Yet, their success might just depend on something for which there is no app: building collective power.

"There are ways for people to push back, it's the same old ways as before," said Tom Slee. "It's acting together, acting collaboratively, whether through unions or otherwise. It's a combination of direct means and lobbying for regulatory protection as well."

# READY TO ORGANIZE

## GRAD STUDENTS LOOK TO CAPITALIZE ON NLRB RULING

By Rachel Cassavanta

Graduate students at private universities have the right to unionize, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled in a 3-1 decision in August, responding to a petition brought by students at Columbia University and the United Auto Workers (UAW). The ruling is a major victory in a 15-year fight by Columbia grad students and their counterparts at other private universities to form collective bargaining units against steep resistance from officials at their schools.

"I'm elated," said Joscelyn Jurich, a fifth-year grad student organizer who is seeking a doctorate in communication through Columbia's School of Journalism. "But there's a long road to come ahead."

Life's not all tea and crumpets in the Ivy League, Jurich explained.

Graduate student workers usually receive a modest yearly stipend to teach or serve as research assistants as they work for their diplomas. At Columbia it typically ranges from about \$22,000 to \$28,000. But often students wind up putting in as much as three times more hours per week than are required at the behest of their professors, who are not only their academic mentors but also their managers.

"It can be tricky for students to negotiate [the workload]," said Jurich. "One's supervisor in work is also one's supervisor intellectually."

The hours grad students put in working for universities like Columbia come in addition to conducting their own writing and research in pursuit of their degrees, all while juggling jobs off-campus in order to get by. And although for many grad school workers it takes six and sometimes up to eight or nine years to complete their doctorates, their stipends disappear long before they receive their diplomas. It varies per school, but in Jurich's program graduate student funding dries up after three years — a particularly hard blow for international students whose visas do not permit them to work anywhere but on campus where jobs are hard to come by.

It's these issues around hours and compensation, not to mention health insurance and childcare that have led graduate students to seek out union representation. University administrations have fought them every step of the way and there is no sign the pressure will be letting up anytime soon as student workers seek certification through the NLRB.

Grad students at Columbia, Brown,

Tufts and the University of Pennsylvania first launched union drives back 2001 after an NLRB ruling the previous year forced New York University (NYU) to recognize grad student representation through the UAW. But in 2004, new members on the relations board overturned its previous decision. NYU refused to recognize the union again until 2013 and only after consistent, bottom-up pressure from its grad student workforce.

August's ruling reaffirms students' right to unionize, recognizing them not solely as students — as Columbia and other universities that filed briefs in the case argued — but also as university employees, entitled to basic labor protections.

In response the ruling, several universities — Columbia, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, the University of Chicago — have set-up web pages purporting to be informational, but which students have decried as fear-mongering.

"Stipend levels, remuneration, and benefits may change; there is no guarantee that they will increase," Columbia cautions students. And, "If the union calls a strike, union members could be fined by the union if found to be not

**HOW FAR WILL SOME OF THE WORLD'S WEALTHIEST PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES GO TO KEEP THEIR GRAD STUDENTS FROM UNIONIZING?**

in compliance with the strike action. Academic activities regarded as work by the union contract such as teaching and research would be suspended for the duration of the strike, which might delay a student's time-to-degree or research agenda."

Jurich said there is wide support on campus, from students and professors, for a grad worker union and that organizers have begun educating new arrivals to the university about the union drive.

"We want to have a contract with the university, so that we understand the terms of our labor," said Jurich. "And we want that labor to have more equity across the university than it does at this moment. Sure, this is about private universities but a union is something people need in all workplaces."

No date has been set for a unionization vote at Columbia or elsewhere yet, but legal analysts expect universities to appeal should they be dissatisfied with the results.

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**EDUCATION**

# A COLLEGE WITHOUT PROFESSORS

BY PETER RUGH

Walking through the halls of Long Island University's Brooklyn campus recently, Mina Attalla saw something through the open doors of a classroom that made him do a double take. There in front of the room, instructing students in a mandatory freshman English course, the junior pharmacology student recognized a member of the school's custodial staff.

"He was fumbling around," said Attalla. "You could tell he really didn't know how to go about it."

It was a scene characteristic of the mayhem that ensued when LIU's administration locked out professors at the university's Brooklyn campus, just days before the Sept. 7 start of the fall semester.

Under pressure from educators, however, whose picket-lines bottlenecked the university's doors at the corner of Dekalb and Flatbush, and from students, who staged numerous walkouts, the LIU opened its doors to its professors once more.

"The administration will end their unprecedented lockout effective 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 14," read a statement from the union representing the Brooklyn campus's 400 professors, the LIU Faculty Federation (LIUFF). "We will be reunited with our students and can resume our professional lives."

The statement noted that educators will be reimbursed for health care costs during the lockout and that the union will continue to "vigorously" pursue unfair labor practice complaints against the university related to the forced work stoppage.

But trust in the university's leadership remains far from restored. The administration had assured its 8,000 students the lockout was conducted in order to "achieve a seamless start to the school year." It had already begun "recruiting and readying a temporary group of adjuncts with advanced degrees."

It turns out it's not so easy running a university without professors.

## CLASSROOM CHAOS

Students, many of whom are going into debt in order to receive diplomas from the private institution, were greeted by chaos when they arrived for class on the first day of school. Their professors were replaced by members

of the administration or anybody it could round up. Several students reported not finding any teachers present in their classrooms at all.

"They couldn't have done anything more disruptive than lock us out," said Deborah Mutnick, who has taught English at the university for 30 years and is a member of the LIUFF's executive committee.

LIU claimed barring its faculty from campus was a preemptive measure, to prevent the educators, whose contract expired Aug. 31, from walking out. It pointed to an authorization vote in favor of a strike the union held in May. But such votes are commonly taken by unions to empower their bargaining teams and the lockout took place before faculty had even voted on the administration's proposal.

"For them to say they were avoiding the chaos of a work stoppage is obscenely disingenuous," Mutnick said. "This is an action the administration took to coerce us into signing a bad contract. It is a step they took in order to break our union."

LIU wants to put tenured faculty up for periodic review, which Mutnick and other instructors consider a threat not only to their job security but their academic freedom. It has also proposed cuts to pay and benefits for adjunct professors.

Another bone of contention: LIUFF members want a contract that does more to address the disparity in pay between educators at the university's lucrative suburban campus in Brookville, New York compared to those in Brooklyn. Professors in Brooklyn teach a student body comprised primarily of people of color while in Brookville the majority of students are white. Professors there make as much as 20 percent more than their counterparts in the city.

The LIUFF ultimately rejected the administration's previous offer by 226 to 10 on Sept. 6. That same day, LIU Brooklyn's faculty senate cast a vote, 135 to 10, of no confidence in the university's president, Kimberly Cline, and vice president for academic affairs, Jeffrey Kane.

## STUDENT WALKOUTS

In support of their professors, hundreds of LIU students participated walkouts during the lockout, evidence that overtures from Cline — that the administration's punitive negotiating tactics are in the interest of keeping tuition down — haven't won the student body over.





PETER RUGH

Furthering the rift between the administration and those who learn and teach at the university, the lockout fueled speculation that the LIU is seeking a pretense to close down its Brooklyn campus. The many hundreds of millions of dollars the university could fetch for the property Downtown, where real estate values are ballooning, are more than it could dream of collecting from tuition in years to come. But Michael Pelias, a philosophy professor at LIU for 25 years and a member of the team negotiating with the university, argues such conjecture is unfounded.

LIU might rent out or sell off sections of its property here and there, he explained, but to abandoned the campus wholesale to developers would violate its certificate of incorporation from the New York Board of Regents. He said such speculation misses the real issue in the labor dispute and LIU's attack on the union: neoliberalized learning.

"Real estate is valuable, obviously," Pelias said. "But this is really an attack on higher education, on the humanities and critical thinking." The administration wants "to reshape the university in the form of a corporate university — a new type of corporatization of education that emphasizes business education at the expense of humanities, a simple reproduction of the system rather than a critical assessment."

As educators return to their classes, negotiations between LIU and faculty are ongoing. The university has agreed to the LIUFF's demand that the two sides engage in professional mediation and that its previous collective bargaining agreement be extended until the end of May, which the union says gives it time to reach a more equitable deal.



PETER RUGH

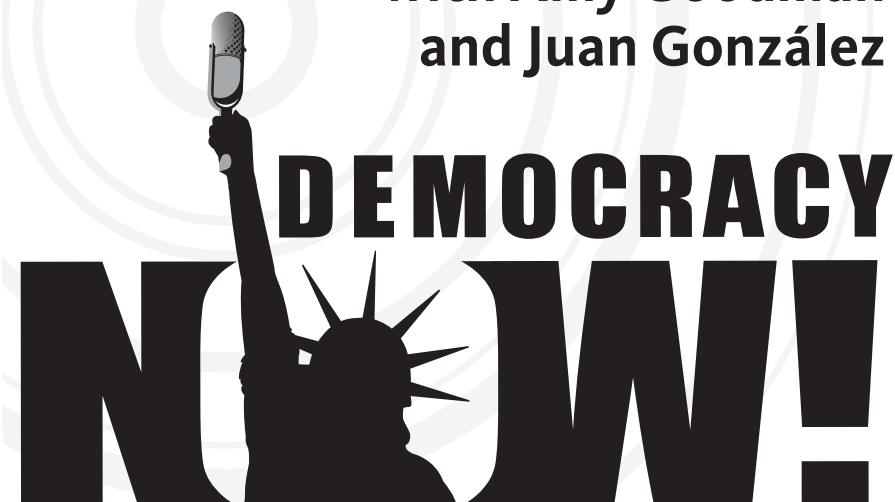
#### OUT-OF-CLASSROOM

**LEARNING:** After Long Island University locked out faculty at the beginning of the semester, students joined their professors on the picket line outside their school.

#### NOT FOOLED:

LIU students demand the return of their professors.

A Daily Independent  
Global News Hour  
with Amy Goodman  
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# WATER IS LIFE

PHOTOS BY JOE BRUSKY  
TEXT BY PETER RUGH

Construction on the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) near the Missouri and Cannonball rivers in North Dakota came to a halt on Sept. 9 at the behest of the departments of Justice and Interior and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which announced it is reconsidering permits it granted the pipeline under the Environmental Protection Act.

The pause in construction was a victory for the Standing Rock Sioux and thousands of their supporters, most of whom are Native American, who have set up camp to blockade the pipeline along the 1,100-mile path where it is slated to carry 470,000 barrels of crude oil per day from wells in North Dakota to a river port in Illinois.

Thousands of people have joined the protest camp, known as Camp Sacred Stone, in recent weeks, including members and representatives of more than 100 tribes. It the largest and most diverse gathering of indigenous people in the United States in decades. A makeshift village has emerged with a school, dining mess, and supply depot.

Those on hand describe themselves as “protectors” not protesters. They accuse the Dakota Access Pipeline company of destroying sa-

cred burial grounds and have raised alarms that the pipeline, should it rupture, would poison the Missouri River, a source of drinking water for the tribe and millions of others in the region.

Protectors have been met with fierce resistance from law enforcement and private security hired by the Dakota Access Pipeline company who have used dogs to attack demonstrators and sprayed them with mace. On Sept. 8, North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple deployed approximately 100 members of the National Guard to back up police. Law enforcement roadblocks have been established around the Standing Rock reservation near where the camp is located.

The protectors at Sacred Stone have vowed to remain in order to guard against future attempts to resume construction and the camp continues to be a source of inspiration to environmentalists across the pipeline’s multistate path, where construction continues.

Photographer Joe Brusky and other members of the Wisconsin Light Brigade were invited to visit Camp Sacred Stone over Labor Day Weekend, when the size of the encampment swelled to 6,000 people. He shared these images with The Independent.



**WELCOME:** A man relaxes in front of a check-in tent where new arrivals are greeted at Camp Sacred Stone beside Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota.

**TEEPEE:** An ancient abode, lit from within, rests beside an improvised parking lot. Members of the North Dakota National Guard have been assisting state troopers in maintaining roadblocks on the northern and eastern roads leading into Standing Rock, checking for outstanding warrants and restricting the flow of goods and people into the camp.



**ONE DEMAND:** It’s a simple message, but one the pipeline company has done everything in it’s power to silence.

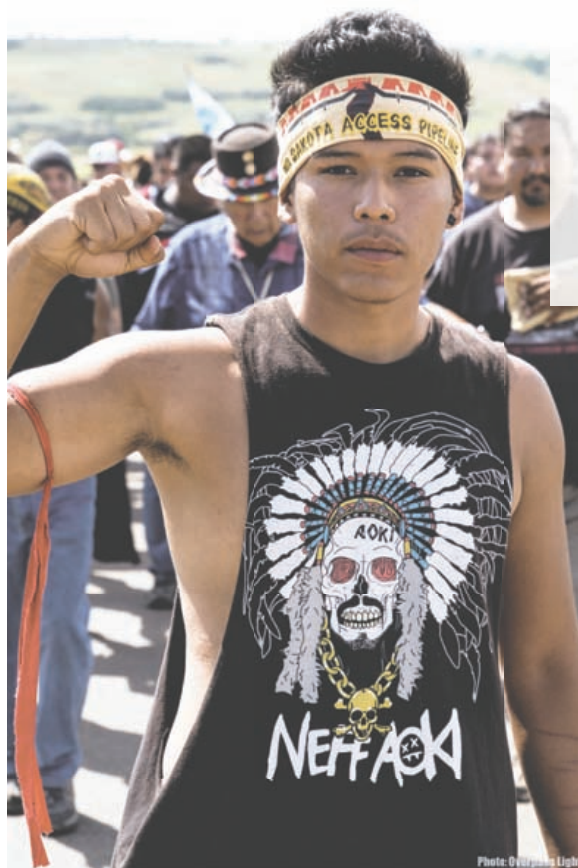
**CEREMONY:** During a welcome ceremony at Sacred Stone community members took the opportunity to speak, dance, drum, or greet other campers in ways that fit their tribe’s traditions and culture. Afterwards everyone shook hands and introduced themselves to new arrivals.

**HERE WE COME:** These protectors, who have taken over a road leading to a pipeline construction site, must be a formidable sight to any bulldozer driver in there way.





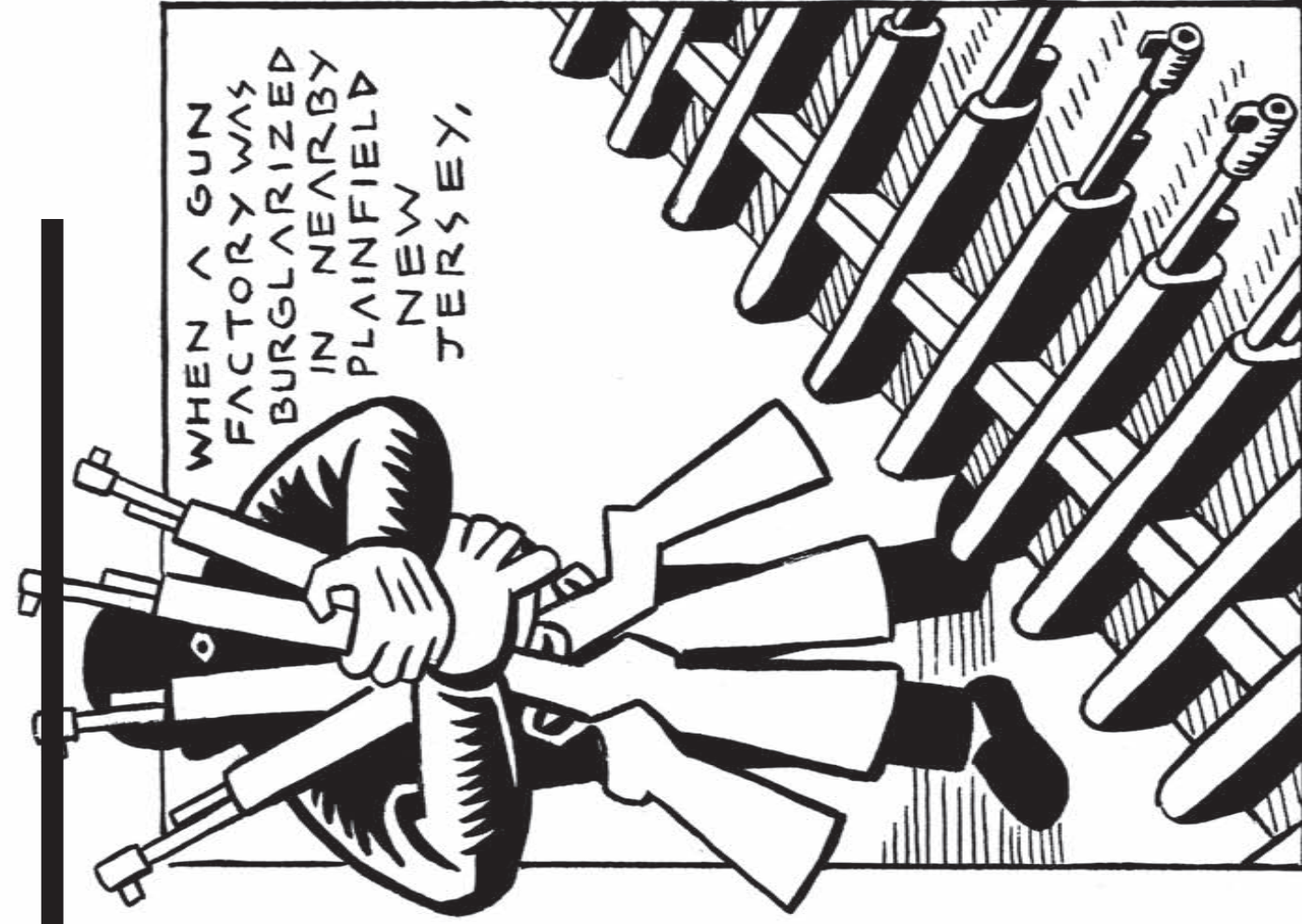
**HORSE RACE:** Elders at Sacred Stone have organized activities for the children to have fun while the adults square off against the Dakota Access Pipeline company. When this photo was taken private security contractors two miles away were using dogs to attack demonstrators, or *protectors*, as Sacred Stone residents refer to themselves.



**NEXT GENERATION:** A young protector with his fist in the air.







FORCING PEOPLE OUT  
OF THEIR HOMES.  
THEY BROKE IN ON  
A WOMAN WHO WAS  
NURSING HER CHILD.



# REPRESENTING THE RADICALS

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

For half a century, criminal defense lawyer Leonard Weinglass defended a who's who of the twentieth-century left in some of America's most spectacular trials. His clients included the Chicago 7, Daniel Ellsberg, Abbie Hoffman, Mumia Abu-Jamal among many others. In this excerpt from Seth Tobocman's new graphic novel, we learn how Weinglass found his life's calling in the aftermath of the 1967 Newark riots against police brutality and the city's white-minority government.



IT MEANT THE  
WHITE-DOMINATED POLITICAL  
MACHINE HAD TO GIVE WAY TO  
THE BLACK MAJORITY, IT ALSO  
MEANT THAT \$-D-S VOLUNTEERS  
WOULD HAVE TO STEP ASIDE.





# WHAT ARE THEY AFRAID OF?

## PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES JILL STEIN AND GARY JOHNSON ARE LEFT OUT OF FALL DEBATES

# Open the Debates!

BY JEFF COHEN

If all the major TV networks got together and decided to televise a presidential debate restricted to Republican nominee Donald Trump and Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson, while barring Democrat Hillary Clinton, it would be recognized as an act of media bias. But what if the debates this fall are restricted to just Trump and Clinton? That, too, needs to be recognized as an intentional act of media exclusion.

Since 1988, televised presidential and vice-presidential debates have been controlled by a private organization with no official status: the Commission on Presidential Debates. The commission grew out of a deal cut in the 1980s by GOP and Democratic leaders. Today, even though the U.S. public largely distrusts the two major parties' presidential candidates, TV networks seem willing to let them again dictate the terms of debate, including who gets to participate.

Presidential debates have been televised in every campaign since 1976. (They rarely happened before then; the Kennedy-Nixon debates of 1960 were an exception.) From 1976 through 1984, they were sponsored and run by the nonpartisan League of Women Voters. In 1980, the League insisted on including independent candidate John Anderson.

In 1985, the national chairs of the Democratic and Republican parties, Paul Kirk and Frank Fahrenkopf, signed an agreement that referred to future debates as "nationally televised joint appearances conducted between the presidential and vice-presidential nominees of the two major political parties. . . It is our conclusion that future joint appearances should be principally and jointly sponsored and conducted by the Republican and Democratic Committees."

In February 1987, the two announced the formation of the Commission on Presidential Debates, with themselves as co-chairs. Their joint press release called the new group "bipartisan." According to the *New York Times*, Fahrenkopf indicated at their press conference that the CPD was not likely to favor including third-party candidates, while Kirk said he personally believed they should be excluded, as it was "my responsibility to strengthen the two-party system."

When the CPD took control in 1988, the League of Women Voters announced it would no longer sponsor debates "because the demands of the two campaign organizations would perpetrate a fraud on the American voter. It has become clear to us that the candidates' organizations aim to add debates to their list of campaign-trail charades devoid of substance, spontaneity and answers to tough questions."

Since then, TV networks have abandoned any role as journalistic decision-makers and let the self-appointed CPD and the major-party campaigns control the debates, including their format and who gets to ask questions. The only third-party candidate ever included was billionaire Ross Perot in 1992.

Public pressure is needed to get the TV networks to recognize that they are at a crossroads: Will they act journalistically and independently in the interests of democracy—or will they continue to be dictated to by a

commission whose unabashed mission since 1987 has been to protect a two-party duopoly?

A protest is planned at the first debate, on Sept. 26 at Hofstra University on Long Island, and RootsAction (a group I co-founded) has collected almost 20,000 signatures on a petition to expand eligibility for the debates. That petition urges including candidates who are on enough state ballots to have a mathematical chance of winning, if they either "register at 5 percent in national public opinion polls OR register a majority in national public opinion polls asking eligible voters which candidates they would like to see included." That formula would probably enable Gary Johnson, former governor of New Mexico, and Green Party candidate Jill Stein, a physician and health-care activist from Massachusetts, to participate.

American politics have changed dramatically since the 1980s. According to Gallup Poll, the percentage of Americans identifying as political independents has been at record highs for five years, at 42 percent in 2015. Democrats are at their lowest point in the poll's history, just 29 percent, while Republicans are very near their low, at 26 percent. Both major-party candidates have record-high unfavorability ratings in polls, with Clinton at 55 percent unfavorable in the latest Real Clear Politics polling average and Trump at 59 percent.

Mainstream TV networks are fully aware of the dissatisfaction with the major-party candidates, and their polls now often include Johnson and Stein — who offer stark policy alternatives to Clinton and Trump. In polls taken in August by NBC News, CNN and ABC News, the Libertarian was backed by 8–11 percent of respondents, with Stein getting 4–5 percent. An August McClatchy-Marist poll found both third-party nominees ahead of Trump among registered voters under 30, with Johnson at 23 percent, Stein at 16 percent, and Trump at only 9 percent.

The last time there were two such strong third-party candidates was in 2000, with consumer advocate Ralph Nader on the left and pugnacious pundit Patrick Buchanan on the far right. Polls showed solid majorities of the voting public (64–25 percent in one poll) wanted to see them included in a four-way presidential debate. But the CPD had erected a new barrier: These well-known candidates could not join the debates unless they were polling at 15 percent.

That barrier was not aimed at eliminating "nonviable candidates," but to prevent an outsider from becoming viable. In the 1998 gubernatorial election in Minnesota, Minnesota Public Radio and the Minnesota League of Women Voters chapter had included third-party candidate Jesse Ventura in their series of gubernatorial debates, though he was at only 10 percent in polls before the debates began. Ventura, a "fiscally conservative and socially liberal" former pro wrestler who was mayor of a Minneapolis suburb, won the election with 37 percent of the votes.

In the interests of democracy, the best option for the networks would be to tell the CPD and

major-party campaigns: "We will no longer automatically exclude candidates outside the Democratic and Republican parties, and we will televise debates controlled by journalists that include all four candidates: Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, Gary Johnson and Jill Stein. If Trump or Clinton balk, we'll leave their podium empty."

*Jeff Cohen is director of the Park Center for Independent Media at Ithaca College. He co-founded the online activism group RootsAction.org in 2011 and founded the media watch group FAIR in 1986.*

### VOICES FROM OUTSIDE

*Hofstra University's normally tranquil campus will once again be the site of vocal protests on Sept. 26, when demonstrators descend on Long Island to demand their preferred candidates have a spot on stage at the first of three presidential debates this fall.*

*It's becoming an American tradition.*

*In 2008, horse-mounted Nassau County Police officers trampled members of Veterans for Peace and Iraq Veterans Against the War who were protesting outside Hofstra to voice dissatisfaction with the pro-war positions of both the Republican and Democratic candidates. Three peace activists were hospitalized, 15 arrested.*

*Four years later, Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein and her running mate Cheri Honkala were detained and shackled to chairs for eight hours in a Nassau County police station. Their crime: attempting to enter the debate area and refusing to clear out when security blocked their way.*

*This time around, Libertarian Party presidential candidate Gary Johnson and, again, the Green Party's Stein are calling to be included in the debate. Polls indicate the American people want to give them a chance. Seventy-six percent of respondents to a Suffolk University/USA TODAY poll said they support the inclusion of third-party candidates in the debates.*

*Activists with the Green Party are planning to hold a rally at Hofstra. Stein will be there. According to the calendar on his website Johnson won't. He'll be hosting a viewing party at the Railyard Sports Lounge in Appomattox, V.A. that evening but his supporters will likely turn up.*

*Of course most of the public won't see what transpires outside Hofstra's auditorium. More than 65 million people watched the first presidential debate four years ago and ratings will likely be high again as the American public tunes in to watch a Clinton-Trump trainwreck. More viewers, doesn't necessarily mean they like what they see. Candidates from the two major parties each have unfavorable ratings that exceed 50 percent.*

— INDYPENDENT STAFF



# DON'T USE VETS TO DISMISS QB'S BRAVE PROTEST



SIX/ALAN ALEXIS

BY DOUG RAWLINGS

When San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick protested systemic police violence against Blacks and other people of color by refusing to stand for the national anthem at a pre-season football game, he ignited a national debate about everything from police misconduct to why we bother to sing the national anthem before sports events.

It was long overdue. But since the public first learned of Kaepernick's silent protest and his reasons for doing so, his critics have demanded he shut up as they deem his actions to be offensive to veterans.

That pushes my buttons. I am a veteran who was sent to Vietnam from 1969 to 1970. I'm sick of watching unscrupulous politicians use veterans as human shields to blunt criticism of their favored policies. As a member of Veterans For Peace, I have taken a pledge to not remain silent about the devastating impact of war. Nor do I think we should remain quiet about the epidemic of police violence in our country.

This is what Kaepernick, who is biracial, was referring to when he told reporters "it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder."

## A FOOTBALL FAN'S DILEMMA

I am a diehard New England Patriots fan who has convinced himself that football is all about what happens

between the white lines. Who cares that Tom Brady is a right-leaning Republican who is proud to be associated with Donald Trump if he can deliver those exquisite passes? As for Kaepernick the football player, I have begrudgingly respected his ability to shred the most elaborate NFL defenses since he led his team to the Super Bowl in 2012 in only his second year in the league. So I can imagine how jarring it must be for my fellow football fans to suddenly see him step forward as a citizen and use his fame to make football about more than the game itself.

Which is exactly what powerful political statements should do to us — make us stop and think and even reconsider deeply held beliefs. Make us uneasy. In the spirit of Muhammad Ali, who publicly refused military service during the Vietnam War and took a principled stand against the deep racist currents running through this culture, the great Cleveland Browns running back Jim Brown and the Boston Celtics star Bill Russell, who both supported Ali, Colin Kaepernick has shattered another taboo. He has wrested Sunday afternoons from the hands of corporate shills and forced a meaningful discussion of the insidious plague of racialized police violence into our stadiums' hallowed press boxes.

Doug Rawlings is retired college administrator who lives in Maine. He is the author of two books of poetry and a co-founder of Veterans For Peace, a nationwide organization of veterans and their allies dedicated to abolishing war as an instrument of national policy. For more, see [veteransforpeace.org](http://veteransforpeace.org).

## A NATIONAL ANTHEM WE CAN STAND FOR

Colin Kaepernick has brought renewed attention to the national anthem, a patriotic hymn composed in the early 1800s that has been fixture at sporting events since World War II. Kaepernick and others who have joined him have noted the contrast between the anthem's celebration of freedom and the injustices experienced by people of color. So how would it sound if the stirring melodies of the anthem were set to lyrics that envisioned a radically different kind of society?

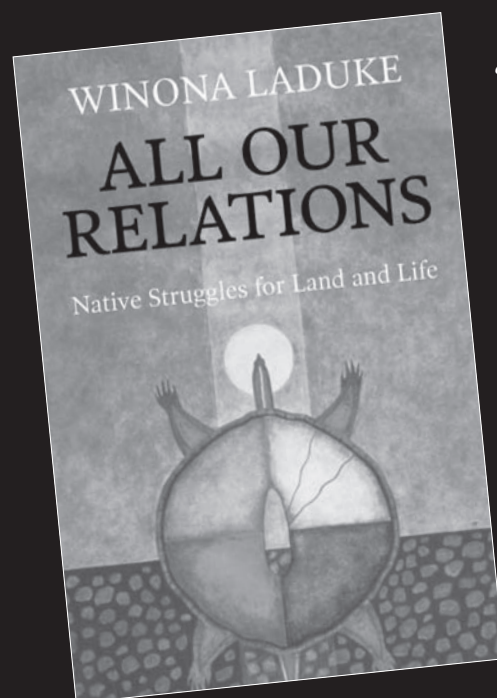
Longtime activists Ellen Davidson and Tarak Kauff decided to find out in 2011 and wrote a new version of a very old song.

"The original version of the anthem was so militaristic and glorifying of war," said Davidson, a contributing editor at this publication and an accomplished choral singer who has performed numerous times at Carnegie Hall. "This was an aspirational hymn to what can be."

The lyrics appear below. To listen to Davidson and the Veterans for Peace chorus perform the song, go to [independent.org](http://independent.org).

O say can you see  
revolution's bright light?  
Peace and justice  
prevailed, and our  
truth is still gleaming.  
This broad movement of  
ours has come strong  
through the night.  
We have dared to create  
a new world with our  
dreaming.  
And the truth's steely  
glare, their lies  
bursting in air  
Gave proof through the  
night that our cause it  
was fair.  
O say do those hand-  
painted banners yet  
wave  
O'er a land that is free,  
with resistance so  
brave.

— JOHN TARLETON



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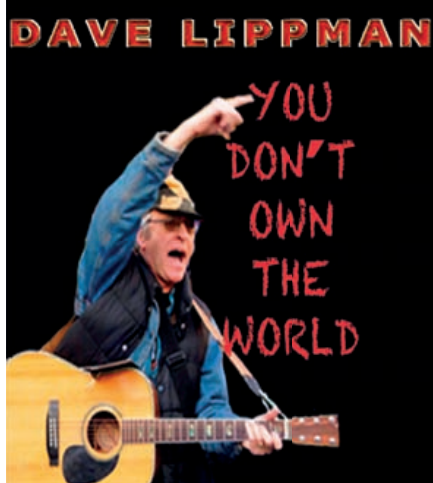
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## LATIN AMERICA

# AFTER 50 YEARS OF WAR, A STAB AT PEACE

## COLOMBIA'S VOTERS TO DECIDE FATE OF HISTORIC PEACE ACCORDS

BY MARIO MURILLO

“Only in Colombia do we have to vote on whether or not we want to live in peace,” someone posted on Twitter recently, referring to the upcoming referendum on whether to ratify the historic peace agreement between the government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). On Oct. 2, Colombians will go to the polls and answer a simple question with either a “yes” or a “no”: “Do you support the final accord to end the conflict and build a stable and lasting peace?”

At first glance, a yes vote sounds like a no-brainer. The conflict, which began more than a half-century ago, has killed over 220,000 Colombians, most of them poor civilians in the countryside. It has also led to one of the worst internal refugee crises in the world. Despite recent decreases, almost 7 million of Colombia's 47 million people have been forced off their land to escape the violence — the largest population of internally displaced people in the world, according to the U.N. refugee agency. The conflict also saw thousands of forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial executions, and cases of torture. Who in their right mind wouldn't want to put an end to this level of bloodshed and displacement?

While the Colombian and U.S. media tend to point the finger at FARC for these and most of the country's other ills, the 7,000-member guerilla organization — the largest Marxist insurgency in Latin America — cannot be held accountable for all that violence. Right-wing paramilitaries and their close allies in the state security forces must take more of the blame. But there is no doubt that silencing the guns of FARC and ending the government's actions against them would go a long way on the road to building some kind of peace in Colombia after a long, tragic history of war.

In late August, after over four years of talks in Havana, the two sides finalized a 297-page peace accord. They hammered out an elaborate five-point agenda addressing many of the root causes of the conflict and the steps that were needed to end it:

- Land reform and rural development;
- Political reforms and increased participation in national politics;
- Dealing with illicit coca cultivation in the countryside;
- Transitional justice for combatants and war criminals;
- FARC demobilization and reintegration into civilian society.

The simple yes-or-no choice presented by the referendum does not take into account how the accord will be implemented and the profound divisions that exist after decades of civil war, militarization and politically motivated violence.

### RIGHTWING OPPOSITION TO THE PEACE ACCORDS

Nowhere is the resistance to any agreement with FARC more visible or vocal than in the rightwing political movement founded and led by Sen. Alvaro Uribe Vélez, Colombia's president from 2002 to 2010. For years, Uribe has been the poster child of an almost fanatical anti-FARC discourse that combines an unapologetic, bloodthirsty quest for vengeance (his father was killed by FARC in 1983 during a botched kidnapping attempt) with a self-righteous political conservatism and iron-fisted security policies.

Any critics of his approach became his political enemies, whom he accused of being sympathizers or direct collaborators with what he describes as the “narco-terrorist” FARC.

During his two terms in office, Uribe was often credited with bringing security back to Colombia after decades of military advances by FARC and major defeats for the nation's military. He rejected the notion that the conflict was political, calling it a war on criminality and terrorism. He cozied up to U.S. President George W. Bush's administration, and was rewarded with billions of dollars of military and security assistance under Plan Colombia, established by Bill Clinton. His government dealt considerable blows to FARC, reducing its numbers from roughly 17,000 fighters to about 8,000. Much of the top leadership of FARC was either killed or detained, and the number of guerillas deserting increased significantly.

These strategic gains came at a cost in human rights and civilian life. From 2002 to 2008, the Colombian Army was implicated in what became known as the “false positives” scandal, where they detained young civilian men from poor communities in the cities, took them into the countryside, dressed them up as FARC combatants, and executed them on the spot. They converted over 3,000 innocent people into trophy corpses to demonstrate how effectively they were winning the war. The Army commander who oversaw this policy, Gen. Mario Montoya, was a close associate of Uribe, and the president often called him a national hero.

Uribe also carried out a controversial peace deal with the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), the umbrella organization of the paramilitary armies with 30,000 troops that waged a dirty war in the countryside against perceived FARC supporters for more than 20 years. Critics of Uribe's current opposition to the peace deal with FARC point to the profound contradiction between his rhetoric about “negotiating with terrorists” and letting FARC off the hook with “complete impunity” and the AUC's unrivaled record of brutality and violence, and the low number of its former combatants who have been held accountable since the demobilization agreement.

**PROFOUND DIVISIONS  
REMAIN AFTER DECADES  
OF POLITICALLY  
MOTIVATED VIOLENCE.**

That clear double standard has made Colombians increasingly skeptical about Uribe's public denunciations of his successor's rapprochement with FARC. That dozens of his closest political allies have been implicated, charged, or arrested for having direct connections to the AUC leadership — known as the “Para-política” scandal — has also diminished the former president's position.

Despite a long trail of evidence connecting Uribe to the criminality of the paramilitaries, he continues to represent a powerful political force in the country. His constituents re-tweet everything he says as if it were gospel, while the up-and-coming members of his party emulate his rhetoric of righteous indignation and a substantial dose of fear. “We will become another Cuba or Venezuela,” the Uribistas proclaim. “We cannot surrender our nation to communism.” During my recent visit to Colombia, this reminded me of the presidential campaign of Donald Trump.

When the names of the international observers who would serve as civilian guarantors for the demobilization process were announced in July, Uribe warned his followers that President Santos was allowing the Cuban military to occupy Colombian territory, simply because there were several Cubans on the list (along with Europeans, Latin Americans, and representatives from other countries). That lie became headline news for three days.



# PEACE



FARC

## SUPPORTING PEACE, REJECTING NEOLIBERALISM

When President Santos announced publicly that his administration was launching a comprehensive peace process with FARC, he made it clear that “the model was not negotiable.” In other words, while he was ending the direct conflict with the guerillas, he was not going to change the neoliberal economic model of foreign and domestic investment; the expansion of extractive mining industries and single-crop, large-scale agribusiness; and the privatization of state enterprises. Uribe’s alarmist pronouncements that Santos was surrendering the country to communism ignored that from the start one of the goals of the peace process was to make Colombia safe for the corporate globalization of the 21st century. It is not surprising that much of the country’s business class is backing a “yes” vote in the referendum.

That is why a vast cross-section of the country’s popular movement has considerable reservations about the accords, despite wholeheartedly supporting the end of the military conflict between the state and FARC. Their refrain is essentially “yes” to the peace process, but “no” to the policies of the political and economic establishment.

Under the rubric of the Agrarian Convergence, this growing popular movement recently carried out a 15-day nationwide strike, spearheaded by the indigenous movement, but also including Afro-Colombian groups, peasant-farmer confederations, and the trade union movement. They’ve criticized the government’s widespread privatization decrees in the countryside, its policies on agricultural development, and its issuing of sweeping mining concessions to domestic and multinational energy companies, including some in indigenous territories.

Despite the government’s commitments in the peace accord to follow development policies that

would respect the autonomy of rural communities, its long record of failing to fulfill agreements with social movements gives them little hope that things will be any different in a “post-conflict” Colombia.

The government’s response to protests has been fierce. In the last several months, it has used its special police forces to confront the mass mobilizations head-on and to forcibly dislodge indigenous protesters carrying out acts of resistance in several departments. There has also been an increase in politically motivated attacks against social-movement and human rights activists. According to the human rights group Somos Defensores, at least 35 human rights and social-justice activists around the country were killed in the first six months of this year, and dozens were arbitrarily detained. These were not heavily reported by the Colombian media.

Notwithstanding these reservations, the end of the conflict with FARC is an important step forward in Colombia and should be recognized as a historic achievement by the warring factions who sat at the table for all these years, despite the naysayers and fear-mongers. Now the accord goes before the Colombian people to get the political stamp of approval that President Santos felt was necessary. The peace deal will only be ratified if the “yes” camp passes the arbitrarily established threshold of 4.4 million votes, or 13 percent of the electorate.

*Mario Murillo is a professor of radio, television and film at Hofstra University, and is author of Colombia and the United States: War, Unrest and Destabilization (Open Media Books, 2003).*



AGENCIA PRENSA RURAL

**READY FOR PEACE:** Two young members of the FARC rebel army in Colombia.

**CEASEFIRE:** Residents of Colombia’s capital city of Bogota rally in support of a ceasefire agreement between the government and the FARC.



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THU. SEP 29 • 7PM–9:30PM

DISCUSSION: Studs Terkel was a leftist who valued people over political dogma. In books and broadcasts, Studs paid attention — and respect — to “ordinary” human beings of all classes and colors. Alan Wieder’s *Studs Terkel: Politics, Culture, But Mostly Conversation* is the first comprehensive book about the man.

THU. OCT 6 • 7PM–9:30PM

READING: Donald Trump’s anti-immigration rhetoric actually developed from bipartisan immigration discourse inaugurated in the 1980s. In *The Cultural Politics of U.S. Immigration*, Leah Perry explains how and why this happened.

SUN. OCT 16 • 7PM–9:30PM

BOOK RELEASE: From the authors of the bestselling *Rad American Women A-Z*, comes a bold new collection of 40 biographical profiles, each accompanied by a striking illustrated papercut portrait, showcasing extraordinary women from throughout history.

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## INTERVIEW

# WHEN WOMEN LEAD THE REVOLUTION

## IN A REMOTE CORNER OF SYRIA, FEMALE FIGHTERS ARE TAKING THE BATTLE TO ISIS AND BUILDING A NEW SOCIETY AT THE SAME TIME

BY ELIA GRAN

The Syrian civil war has produced a catalogue of horrors — cities bombed into rubble, the rise of ISIS, refugees fleeing across open seas on makeshift rafts— that have been widely covered in the Western media. During this same time, the dissolution of the Syrian state has opened the doors in one corner of the country for a social revolution that is at odds with the political norms not only of the rest of the Middle East but of the wider world beyond.

In the autonomous region of Rojava women are at the center of this revolution. They fight in all-women militias, staff local police forces and play leading roles in the decentralized system of governance that guides the daily affairs of much of this predominantly Kurdish region of three to four million people. Gender equity, assembly-based democracy and sharing of resources are central tenets of this revolution. If this sounds like something out of an anarchist manifesto, well, it kind of is. The writings of a Vermont-based eco-anarchist philosopher named Murray Bookchin who died a decade ago have been a major source of inspiration for Rojava’s revolution.

The Kurds are an ethnic minority in Syria just as they are in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Iraq and Iran. While the story of Rojava largely has gone unnoticed here in the United States, it caught the eye of feminist writer Meredith Tax. For the author of *Woman and Her Mind: The Story of Everyday Life*, a foundational text in the early U.S. women’s movement, the experiment underway in Rojava proved irresistible. Her latest book, *A Road Unforeseen: Women Fight The Islamic State*, published by Bellevue Literary Press delves into the history of the Kurdish liberation movement and how it has evolved to put women’s empowerment at the center of all its work. She recently spoke with *The Independent* at her New York apartment. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**ELIA GRAN:** *When did you first learn about Rojava and why did it catch your interest?*

**MEREDITH TAX:** In August of 2014, I was watching the story develop of the Yazidis, a minority religious group based in northern Iraq that was trapped in the mountains by advancing ISIS forces. I had been studying ISIS and knew what was likely to happen.

The Yazidis were marooned and had no food or proper clothes. Was the US going to drop supplies? Would that mean the US would get into the war? Then I started seeing pictures of guerrillas who had come out of nowhere and gotten the Yazidis off the mountain into Syria. Many of the guerrillas were smiling young women in uniforms. I had to find out, Who are these people?

In all my years as a feminist on the Left, though I had seen many struggles that included women guerrillas, I’d never seen one with so many women so clearly in front.

I wanted people to know who the Syrian Kurds were and that they were different from the Iraqi Kurds who are close allies of the US. They had a different vision of what they wanted to do. I started trying to learn about Rojava but I couldn’t find anything, except in obscure anarchist publications. I spent the next year researching and ultimately writing *A Road Unforeseen*.

*How did something so egalitarian take root in the middle of a war?*

This is what a war does, it makes everything horrible, scary, kills people and destroys homes but occasionally it opens up a possibility for a group that didn’t have anything before. Rojava’s political and community institutions are comprised of at least 40% of both sexes and led by two co-chairs, one male and one female[MT1]. The women there have had the opportunity, even on a small scale, to exercise leadership and power.

They have started by building from the ground up and at the same time have support from the top down. Here, women push from the bottom but often find a glass ceiling, even on the Left. I doubt that every man among the Kurds is equally open to women’s leadership but they had help from someone at the top helping them break the glass. Abdullah Öcalan’s, the imprisoned leader of the PKK (Kurdistan’s Workers Party), has been very important in this process. It requires pressure from both top and bottom.

*How would you compare the women’s movement in Rojava and what we see in the United States?*

In Rojava, they do stuff. They are serious about theory, but they don’t separate theory and practice. Here it’s like a principle to separate theory and practice. Some of what they do is classic community organizing, like setting up an educational center and then recruiting women to come by and learn how to sew and make a little bit of extra money. But these routine activities are infused with socialist and feminist politics. Coming out of a very traditional rural society, feminists in Rojava have to have consistency and a long-term understanding that it’s essential to have women out there, because they are half the people, and if you make a revolution with only half the people, it might end up benefitting only half.

*The militia members are subject to some very stringent rules.*

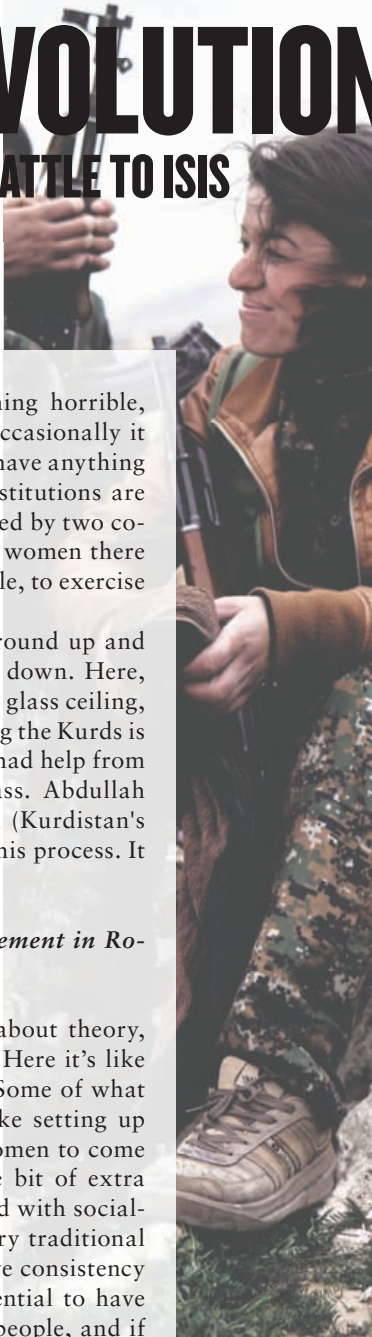
For the men and women in the militias, there is a rule of absolute celibacy. This way, the thinking goes, they won’t be distracted from achieving their objective of liberty and of becoming fully-developed human beings who have left behind all traces of feudal and tribal personality.

It is also based on the idea that men and women aren’t ready, they haven’t been equal long enough to have a good relationship yet. This is linked to the idea that women have to show that they are strong, brave and can make their own decisions on the battlefield. That they can fight as well as men because they are fighting to protect themselves and other women from ISIS slavery. By doing this, women exercise their autonomy and learn how to have leadership, stop being scared and stop imitating men.

Women in Rojava are saying that we have to be just as tough as men, defend ourselves and only then can we create the space to make a different society. It’s saying self-defense is not only about the gun, it’s also ideological. You have to know you’re as good as the guys and you have to know what you stand for.

*How has the U.S. government responded to the situation in Rojava?*

The US didn’t start supporting the Rojavan community until months after ISIS launched an all-out assault on the city of Kobane in 2014, two years into the war. One of the big problems in the region and in Washington, is that the default position is often ethnic partition rather than trying







to find ways to make it possible for Kurds, Arabs, Christians, and all the other ethnic and religious groups in Syria, to collaborate under principles of democratic autonomy that will work for everybody.

Now the Syrian Kurds aren't getting the humanitarian aid they need. Rojava is taking refugees from all parts of Syria. Due to the embargo on both the Turkish and Iraqi sides of their border, they can't get supplies, food, seeds, clothes or medical equipment. People are at risk of preventable epidemic diseases and of bleeding out in the battlefield. They need humanitarian and economic aid — and political support to be part of negotiations — as well as military, and the US has not dealt with that.

*What you see as the future of the social revolution taking place in Rojava?*

In Rojava the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) have persuaded most of the Kurds to adopt gender equality but are they going to be able to do this with other ethnic groups and traditional tribal leaders? And if not, what then? They are committed both to local autonomy and to female equality and these two may conflict.

Many Kurds are secular. The common base is the faith that they can remake society by becoming new men and free women. It's very idealist. They expect people to live in a very rigorous way and not everyone will want to do it.



**CAMARADERIE:** Members of an all-female Kurdish militia take a break while on patrol.

**A WORLD TO WIN:** A commander in the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

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THURSDAYS • beginning SEPTEMBER 29  
5:30 pm • CLASS AND DISCUSSION

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VOLUME 1** with Juliet Ucelli



An accessible intro to the most important sourcebook on Marx's method for analyzing the economy, politics and struggles. We'll cover key concepts and sections of *Volume 1*: use value, value and surplus value; why capitalism has needed conquest, enslavement and white supremacy; why capitalism drives innovation, overwork and unemployment and leads to ecological destruction. Participant reports and life experiences are welcome! • **Juliet Ucelli** has taught labor economics and class/race/gender for labor unions, and was a public high school social worker. She writes on Eurocentrism in Marxist theory, the politics of inner city public schooling and Marxist understandings of human development.

TUESDAYS • beginning OCTOBER 4  
7:30 pm • CLASS AND DISCUSSION

**BLACK MARXISM**  
with Nicholas Powers



As always, capitalism has crises. Again, a new generation turns toward Marxism. How do we apply this wide ranging and controversial revolutionary tradition to our current times? Writer and professor, Cedric Robinson's magnum opus, *Black Marxism* will be our lodestar for us. We will discuss Robinson's critique of Marx's Eurocentric frame of reference and explore how and if Marxism has value for today's multi-cultural left which at times turns much to anarchism, whether conscious or not of the Marxist tradition. We will also cover the Marxist legacy of C.L.R. James, Langston Hughes and Richard Wright on their own and as Robinson studied their relationships to Marxism. • **Nicholas Powers** is a poet, journalist & Associate Professor of Literature at SUNY Old Westbury. His book *The Ground Below Zero: 911 to Burning Man, New Orleans to Darfur, Haiti to Occupy Wall Street* was published by Upset Press in 2013. His writings have appeared in *The Independent*, *The Village Voice*, *Truth-Out* and *Alternet*.

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## TURNING SUFFERING INTO ART

Art AIDS America  
BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS  
THROUGH OCTOBER 23

By Gena Hymowech

The images of queer men protesting during the AIDS crisis is something many of us will never forget, yet we must also remember that people were fighting in other ways as well. The Bronx Museum of the Arts' "Art AIDS America" features over 125 pieces of AIDS art from 1981 — the year the *New York Times* first reported on the disease — to 2016.

Former President Ronald Reagan's grievous inaction is the subject of one of the exhibition's most powerful pieces, Jonathan Horowitz's *Archival Iris Print of an Image Downloaded from the Internet with Two Copies of the New York Post Rotting in Their Frames*, from 2004. It includes two framed issues of the *Post* published after Reagan died, above a photo of an unnamed man who has died of AIDS-related issues. The museum tells us that Reagan didn't even devote a speech to the issue until April 1987. A slogan on the anonymous man's shirt provides a possible answer — "Ignorance = Fear." Meanwhile, Jerome Caja's *Bozo Fucks Death*, a frightening 1988 painting done with nail polish, appears to be putting the blame on gay men themselves.

Considering the government's lack of response, it is amazing that Larry Stanton felt as hopeful as he did creating one of the drawings in his 1984 series *Untitled (Hospital Drawing)*. "I'm going to make it," he wrote, in bold, colorful letters. In the second, Stanton, who died that same year, penned these sentences: "Life is not bad. Death is not bad. I am not afraid of dying. A little sad but not defeated." If that doesn't break your heart, check with your doctor to see if you still have one.

The transition of AIDS from almost certain death to a manageable chronic condition is one of the great miracles of the 20th century, but that didn't come without a price. Joey Terrill's *Still-Life with Forget-Me-Nots and One Week's Dose of Truvada*, a mixed

media piece from 2012, recalls Tom Wesselmann's *Still Life* series. Both showcase foods on a table. In Terrill's work, the Truvada pills are a reminder that AIDS still exists, and that the medicine's side effects are a possible punishment for being a sexually active gay man.

Kiki Smith's *Red Spill* from 1996, red glass pieces made to represent blood, is surprisingly realistic, as is *Unveiling of a Modern Chastity* by Izhar Patkin, a 1981 recreation of Kaposi's sarcoma from rubber, latex, ink and canvas.

Then there are the works that use actual bodily fluids, like Robert Sherer's *Sweet Williams*, from 2013, a drawing made in HIV-positive and negative blood that symbolizes the death of beautiful gay men. Robert Blanchon's *Stains #1 & #2* is a 1994 collection of two photos that show the artist's own stained underwear. Uncomfortable to look at, perhaps, but necessary to see.

*"Life is not bad. Death is not bad. I am not afraid of dying. A little sad but not defeated."*

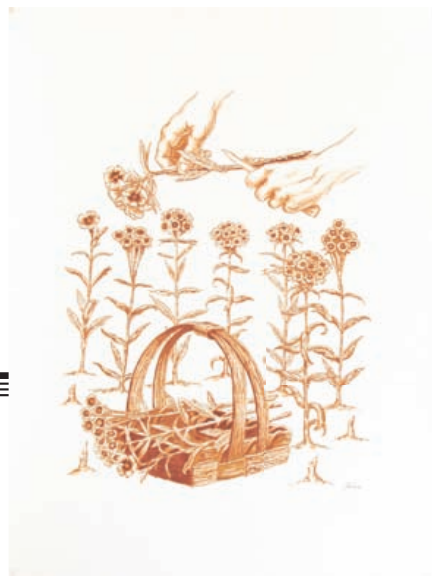
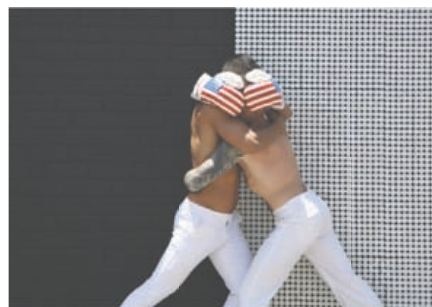
"Art AIDS America" is, as its website says, "the first exhibition to examine the deep and ongoing influence of the AIDS crisis on American art and culture." Unfortunately, that examination is far from exhaustive. Where, you might wonder, is the work of Nan Goldin, a bisexual American woman who famously photographed Cookie Mueller and Vittorio Scarpati, a writer-artist couple who died from AIDS? Where is the illustrator Antonio Lopez? The wall full of photos of women and hemophiliacs who were also affected? This is not to say the exhibition isn't inclusive — Native Americans are represented, which is something I've never seen — but the curators could have done better.

The obvious way to present such an exhibition is chronologically, so the audience has a clear understanding of how the art changed as the virus progressed, but the pieces here are separated by themes of body, spirit, activism and camouflage. It's easy to see where activism and camouflage are, but body and spirit aren't clearly delineated. And really, doesn't all AIDS art fall in some way under the banners of "body" and "activism?"

Some choices are just perplexing. A bunch

of soda bottles strung together and covered partly by wire are all that make up Tony Fehrer's *Green Window*, from 2001, while Felix Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (Water)*, from 1995, is nothing more than a beaded curtain. The museum speculates on how these might represent AIDS, but it feels like a reach.

Despite its weaknesses, though, "Art AIDS America" is still worth seeing — and more than once. Though it's a relatively small exhibition, there is a whole lot to chew on.



Joey Terrill, *Still-Life with Forget-Me-Nots and One Week's Dose of Truvada*; Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, Tacoma Art Museum and the Bronx Museum of the Arts.

Bill Jacobson, *Interim Portrait #373*; courtesy of the artist, Tacoma Art Museum and the Bronx Museum of the Arts.

Ladz (John Arsenault and Adrian Gilliland), *Eden #31*; courtesy of the artists, Tacoma Art Museum and the Bronx Museum of the Arts.

Robert Sherer, *Sweet Williams*; courtesy of the artist, Tacoma Art Museum and the Bronx Museum of the Arts.



## RAD LAWYER

*Len: A Lawyer in History*

By SETH TOBOCMAN, Edited by PAUL BUHLE & MICHAEL STEVEN SMITH  
AK Press, 2016

By Ann Schneider

Five years in the making, this finely distilled history written and illustrated by the great Seth Tobocman is a treasure to own. This graphic novel was commissioned by Michael and Debby Smith as a tribute to their late friend Leonard Weinglass and edited by Smith and Paul Buhle. Published by AK Press, it fits alongside other radical history graphic novels such as Kate Evan's *Red Rosa*, Paul Buhle's *Wobblies* and Larry Gonick's *Cartoon History of the United States*.

*Len* illustrates the life and work of Leonard Weinglass, beginning in 1958 when he got out of the Air Force and served briefly as a New Jersey assistant attorney general before opening a solo practice in Newark. There he met Tom Hayden, who was organizing tenants to engage in rent strikes under the aegis of SDS's Newark Community Union Project. Deindustrialized East Coast cities like Newark were then powder kegs, with Black majorities whose demands for civic participation were contemptuously ignored by all-white administrations in much the same way that the Black majority in Ferguson, Mo. endured decades of abuse under an all-white local government. The Newark rebellion in July 1967 brought police to within 150 feet of housing projects where they began firing through windows, killing Rebecca Brown, a mother who fell while trying to protect her children from injury. Leonard won damages in the aftermath for warrantless searches of Black residents' homes.

Leonard's commitment to the Newark community was soon rewarded by the electoral triumph of Kenneth Gibson in 1970 over corrupt Mayor Hugh Joseph Addonizio, ending white minority rule.

Through brilliant editing, the book brings out historical detail, such as the Yippies' many unsuccessful attempts to obtain a city permit to camp in a park near the 1968 Chicago Democratic National Convention. An attractive young woman was sent to present the application to the Chief of Police, enfolded in a Playboy pin-up. I understood for the first time how Daniel Ellsberg of Pentagon Papers fame could have gone to work for the Rand Institute, a think tank with close ties to the Pentagon. It was a time when it was still possible to believe in the honor of the U.S. government and its foreign policy.

Leonard's career included defending the Chicago Eight, Ellsberg, Mumia Abu Jamal, Kathy Boudin, the Palestine Eight, and the Cuban Five after their convictions by a Miami jury in 2000. But his favorite case was putting the CIA on trial in 1987.

wanted to kick the CIA off the campus. Dozens of locals and Amy Carter, daughter of the former President, occupied a sensitive campus building in Amherst and were arrested. Len's former client Abbie Hoffman from the Chicago Eight trial worked to make the case a cause célèbre, bringing in Ellsberg and former CIA agent Ralph McGehee to testify as experts. McGehee's testimony about Vietnamese captives brought the jury to tears. A young Sandinista supporter (like our present Mayor Bill de Blasio) testified to the terrorism of the contras and death squads in Nicaragua. Tobocman obtained the transcripts of the October 1986 trial as the best source of what occurred.

Although Leonard's lawyering was brilliant, he could not have won the acquittals without the solid political awareness of the Amherst community. It is worth noting in that regard that Bernie Sanders advocated abolishing the CIA in 1974 during his first race for the Senate. Senator Daniel Moynihan introduced legislation to do so in 1995, pointing out its colossal failures as an intelligence agency. Protests to shut down CIA recruiting continue to occur at my alma mater, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where we physically confronted the police in such an effort in 1980.

The author and editors make the point that the same issues we confronted in the 70's and 80's are recurring in new forms. Where the government tried to prosecute Ellsberg for leaking thousands of classified documents to the *New York Times* and other newspapers it now targets whistleblowers like Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning and publishers like Julian Assange of *Wikileaks*.

Seth gives us good likenesses of Tom Hayden, Dave Dellinger, Bobby Seale, Ho Chi Minh, Stokely Carmichael, Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon. One feature that a graphic novel cannot convey was the sonorous tones of Leonard's speaking voice. No wonder judges anticipated his appearance. In the combative environment that lawyers inhabit, Leonard never stooped to irony or sarcasm and instead upheld the dignity of the profession in his method, strategy and habits. His record of wins is impressive but it was his persistence and dedication to his clients, even if the battle took decades, that is his most singular quality.

*Ann Schneider is a member of the board of the NYC chapter of the National Lawyers Guild.*



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# INEQUALITY DIAGNOSED BUT UNCURED

*Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*

BY BRANCO MILANOVIC

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016

*Chronicles on Our Troubled Times*

BY THOMAS PIKETTY

PENGUIN BOOKS, 2016

By Bennett Baumer

When politicians talk about the American Dream, they implicitly evoke the decades-long period of economic expansion from the end of World War II to the early 1970s: An era when working Americans could have suburban homes with white picket fences, college educations, well-paying jobs, and a pension plus Social Security, and then go off to Florida to enjoy visits from the grandkids, bridge games, and evening walks along the beach as the sun set.

Mounting evidence suggests that this American Dream has run its course, and the country has entered a new era of slow growth and rising economic inequality.

Branko Milanovic of the CUNY Graduate Center has written an accessible, powerful book about economics called *Global Inequality, A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*, full of nifty graphs that tabulate reams of economic data. He starts from the theories of Nobel Prize-winner Simon Kuznets—that as countries industrialize, inequality increases at first, but then decreases. This is of course not an accurate description of the United States of America in 2016. Instead of discarding Kuznets, however, Milanovic lays out the argument

that there are alternating waves of increasing inequality and equality—capitalism is dynamic, and the balance of power shifts.

Milanovic talks about “malign” and “benign” forces that drive economic inequality and equality. He dates the “Great Leveling” to after World War I. “Between 1914 and 1980,” he writes, “the decrease in inequality was brought about through a wrenching process, a combination of malign forces like wars and benign economic policies that were characterized by the confluence of interests between left-wing political parties and property-owning classes that, out of fear of new socialist movements... accepted measures that created a broad-based middle class.”

The United States emerged from both world wars largely unscathed in terms of destroyed cities, demolished industrial plants, and weakened currency, while Europe and Japan were smoldering fire pits and China closed its doors. Trade-union influence, high tax rates, the GI bill (increasing access to education), robust government spending (much of it military), increasing population, and technological advances powered American growth and spread the wealth.

This implicit social contract, however, sputtered with the election of Ronald Reagan as President in 1980, a year after Margaret Thatcher’s election as prime minister marked a similar turning point in the United Kingdom. They successfully attacked labor unions (Thatcher the miners and Reagan the air-traffic controllers), lowered tax rates, and began to dismantle social safety nets. Their less right-wing successors, the Labour Party’s Tony Blair and Demo-

crat Bill Clinton, brokered global trade deals and loosened financial regulations. *Global Inequality* traces the rise of internal inequality in Western nations to this period, and names the winners (the Asian middle class) and the losers (the Western lower-middle class). “Between 2008 and 2011, the average urban income in China doubled, and rural incomes increased by 80 percent,” he says. “The absence of growth in the rich world meant not only that incomes of the lower middle classes... stagnate but also that the stagnation extended toward the top.”

As inequality deepens in Western industrialized societies, Milanovic argues that “there have been unmistakable signs of a decrease in global inequality” between nations because the middle classes in India, China, and other Asian countries are getting richer. Nonetheless, he also posits “citizenship premiums,” comparing how people fare at various points on the economic ladder in different countries. In other words, it is better to be poor in Sweden, with its generous social safety net, than in the Congo but it is also better to be rich in Brazil than rich in the Congo. Milanovic’s book contemplates that this could influence migration to countries with stronger social safety nets, and the paths taken by Syrian refugees bear this out: It is better to be at the bottom of German society than the bottom of Hungarian society.

Milanovic’s work is greatly influenced by French economist Thomas Piketty’s economic tome *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Piketty has a new book out, *Chronicles on Our Troubled Times*, that makes similar points. “It’s almost inevitable that growth in the twenty-first century will settle at a rate far lower than the rate of return on capital—that is, what wealth

earns on average over the course of a year, as a percentage of its initial value,” Piketty writes.

*Chronicles* is a compilation of 700-word newspaper columns that Piketty wrote over the past decade for the Paris-based newspaper *Liberation*. In it he offers practical solutions to the European debt crisis. Germany and France enjoy low interest rates for borrowing money, he says, and should extend this power to other European Union members by socializing the heavy debt carried by countries such as Spain and Greece in the form of Euro bonds. Piketty also argues that the EU should reverse austerity measures and end tax havens.

Both Milanovic and Piketty are bearish on the prospects for stemming inequality in the U.S. Milanovic writes of a “perfect storm” of forces such as further rising incomes at the top, highly skilled labor and capital merging (super-managers earning big salaries), and the rich buying elections. Piketty cheekily asks “will oligarchy, or plutocracy, be America’s future?” While racist and nationalist forces are gathering strength in both Europe and the U.S. in a backlash against immigration and economic stagnation, there are bright spots. Black Lives Matter challenged both the Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton campaigns and the underlying inequalities in the justice system. While Donald Trump’s message is mostly crass showmanship and deeply antagonistic towards immigrants, he’s forcing the Republican party to at least pay lip service to the economic concerns of its white base, although his actual economic proposals, except for opposing unfair trade deals, are standard-issue GOP “cut taxes and deregulate” prescriptions.



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## FILM



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## THE FULL SNOWDEN

Snowden

DIRECTED BY OLIVER STONE  
2:14 MINUTES, RATED R  
THEATERS CITYWIDE

By Mark Read

Oliver Stone has made a career out of exploring the paranoid underbelly of U.S. politics. His better films (and there are some crap ones too) explore fundamental contradictions within our society: the overreach of the ruling class, the sacrifice and betrayal of the soldier class, the corruptions that accrue with the pursuit of power. He consistently produces over-the-top historical dramas where these themes plays out a near-operatic scale, with all the manipulative button-pushing that we've come to expect from Hollywood's myth-making machine.

In the person of Edward Snowden, Stone has found the perfect vehicle for exploring these ideas with this style of filmmaking. To call a Stone film "understated" feels almost oxymoronic, but these things are relative, and of all Stone's films this one feels more restrained here than we may have ever seen him. He lets the political story of Edward Snowden speak for itself, for the most part. After all, the peril that Snowden risked to break the story of massive surveillance by the NSA need not be exaggerated. His heroism and integrity have been evident for anyone to see, from the first moment that this story broke. Stone capably shows this all to the viewing audience, largely by getting out of the way of that story and by being faithful to the events. It doesn't hurt that Joseph Gordon-Levitt is absolutely riveting as Snowden, and that there isn't one bad performance in the film. The film is tightly written and visually stunning, too. Stone is nothing if not a master-craftsman.

Some might object to the hallmark-style romance that Stone puts at the center of the film, and the facile treatment of what must be a highly complex relationship, but I think we ought to cut him some slack on that score. It's important for us to understand just how much Snowden was will-

ing to risk, how much he was walking away from. There really is a love story at the heart of this tale. Lindsay Mills (played by Shailene Woodley) really did move to Russia to be with Edward Snowden. And again, the performances are strong enough to pull it off. We believe in their evolving relationship, just as we believe Snowden's evolution from blind patriot to patriot of conscience.

I got to watch a sneak preview of this film at the Brooklyn Library with several friends, and we all walked away feeling it had far, far exceeded our expectations. Hollywood can and frequently does screw up stories that have deeper political implications, often by shorting the politics in favor of the personal. This one strikes a good balance between the two, and it deserves a wide audience.

**HARD CHOICES:**  
Joseph Gordon-Levitt as Edward Snowden with Shailene Woodley who plays his love interest, Lindsay Mills.

## BOOKS

## PRIVILEGE &amp; PRECARIITY IN THE NEW GILDED AGE

*Makers and Takers: The Rise of Finance and the Fall of American Business*

BY RANA FOROOHAR  
CROWN BUSINESS, 2016

*The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*

BY GUY STANDING  
BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC, 2014

By Deborah Johnstone

The erosion of banking regulations has been an insidious and largely clandestine undertaking. Unlike the 1929 crash, after which policy makers attempted to properly regulate the banking industry, the 2008 crash saw Wall Street and Washington align forces to protect their interests.

"Incomprehensible rules crafted and controlled by a small cadre of insiders, discussed in a language that only they understand is one of the key ways elites maintain power — in finance and elsewhere," writes CNN economic analyst Rana Foroohar, who in her new book succinctly tracks Wall Street's monopoly on finance and how it has used that monopoly to induce the average citizen to invest in risk and debt. Foroohar cites the people and companies that capitalize on a systemic dysfunction that perpetuates insecurity and volatility.

Citigroup — the kingpin of banking deregulation — created a financial climate that guaranteed a casino banking system would become the standard. With the 1998 merger of Citicorp and Travelers Group, a fatal blow was delivered to the Depression-era Glass-Steagall Act that maintained a firewall between commercial banking and riskier investment banking. The financial services industry was no longer concerned with helping businesses grow. Instead, the big banks freely gambled with depositors' money while extending their sway over Washington.

Speculation became de rigueur and "assets" such as highly volatile mortgage-backed securities become attractive investments.

Looking back over the decades, Foroohar follows the money from Reagan's fiscal irresponsibility to the halls of Congress and Apple's shadowy offshore banking, and from there to Main Street, where the hubris of financialization has destroyed economic growth. The banking industry claims their solvency is the only thing preventing America from sliding into economic disaster, but over the last 20 to 30 years there's been no evidence that a complex and titanic financial system has contributed to increased growth or stability. In fact, all evidence points to the contrary. The real "trickle-down" effect is stagnant salaries, escalating prices, extreme economic inequality and endemic job loss.

While Foroohar takes on a system

rigged by the powerful to enrich themselves, economist Guy Standing, in *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, tackles the causes of extensive job loss and the rise of the contingent worker. Standing's target is corporate globalization and its preference for a "disposable itinerant labor force." He posits this growing population, typified by

insecurity and alienation, is a pressure cooker waiting to explode into a new sociopolitical force.

Standing focuses on the psychic effects of a global digital revolution that has greatly reduced steady employment. The malaise is global. Precariousness is now a way of life; websites dedicated to freelancing abound and the life of a "part-time" worker is celebrated by innumerable media outlets. Underneath the positive spin, people are suffering.

Standing links technology's promise of instant gratification to a loss of individual and civic ideals. Couple this with work that doesn't pay the rent and the result is despair. People will eventually react. Despite warnings from establishment figures of dire consequences should the U.K. leave the European Union, Brexit became a reality — driven primarily by discontent with a system that had failed to work for a majority.

Many more people need to become mad as hell and even more people need to be aware of the rage. As Foroohar writes in *Makers and Takers*, "The key to reforming our current system is making the American public understand just how deeply and profoundly things aren't working for the majority of the people." Standing argues that the precariat must mobilize and become strategically and socially threatening in order to affect change. If this doesn't happen, there are always racist demagogues like Donald Trump ready to fill the void by tapping into a mounting fear and uncertainty about the nature of work and a lagging economy.

A working-class consciousness has traditionally linked "job security" to a social contract. Since job security has effectively been removed for so many, this no longer holds true. "Twentieth century spheres of labor protection ... were constructed around the image of the firm, fixed workplaces, and fixed working days and work-weeks that apply only to a minority in today's tertiary online society," Standing writes. But not anymore. The global deterioration of job security has left many millions of workers (and would-be workers) uneasy about their futures. These trends will only continue to increase over time leading Standing to believe the precariat class will eventually morph into a populist movement and at that point, "they" will become "we."



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